

The Masterbuilder Tale in Snorri's *Edda* and Two Sagas*

“Masterbuilder Tale” designates a widespread story type in which a human or humans bargain with a supernatural being or beings for the construction of outstanding works of man (cyclopean walls, cathedrals, castles) or natural features that seem deliberately constructed (oddly shaped or placed boulders, landspits), the payment to be something of great importance to the human if the construction is successfully completed. A deadline is a frequent feature of the story, and the otherworldly builder is usually cheated of his hire. The tale is found all over Europe in many versions and variants and is usually regarded as a migratory legend or *Wandersage*¹ with etiological function, but the existence of an Old Norse myth telling a story of the same type and attested at least four centuries before the earliest folktale versions poses a special problem for historical study and is further complicated by the fact that the only certain attestation of the myth is in the late, sophisticated handbook of Snorri Sturluson and shows strong traces of his creative hand. Various geographical-historical explanations of the patterns of distribution

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1. Reidar Th. Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends: A Proposed Catalogue and List of Variants*, FFC 175 (1958), No. 7065.

and the development of the story itself are possible, but no satisfactory solution to the question posed by the parallel existence of the mythic and secular folktale modes in the same type of tale has ever been offered. To quote Jan de Vries: “As to the transition between myth and folk-tale, we grope in the dark.”² The present paper will attempt to solve this problem by the introduction of a new analogue and the reconstruction of its history and relation to the myth. Let it be conceded in advance that a certain circularity inheres in the method, as in every attempt at deriving literary-historical conclusions from reconstruction, but justification lies in the explanatory power of the resulting genetic account.

I. Folktale or myth?

Since the Masterbuilder Tale has received a good deal of attention from folklorists and several able surveys are available, I shall sketch only briefly the main types of the tale in their geographic distribution.³ In southern Europe the builder or builders are usually fairies.⁴ In Germany, the Low Countries, and Central Europe the devil is the builder, and the reward he demands is a human soul, typically that of the contractor or his child. For example, a legend from Lower Saxony tells how a farmer was in need of an especially large barn. The devil promised to build it for him “in a single night, before cock-crow, if

2. *The Problem of Loki*, FFC 110 (1933), p. 76.

3. To the survey of folktale scholarship given by Inger M. Boberg, “Baumeistersagen,” FFC 151 (1955), 1–24 add the studies by Krohn, Egardt, and Liungman cited below and Sigfrid Svensson’s review of Boberg, “Baumeistersagen,” in *Rig* 39 (1956), 30–31; “Sågnerna om den första kyrkplatsen. Finnsågnen,” discussants: Dag Strömbäck, Sigfrid Svensson, Olav Bö, Waldemar Liungman, and others, in *Norden och kontinenten: föredrag och diskussioner vid Trettonde nordiska folkliks- och folkminnesforsarmötet i Lund, 1957*, Skrifter från Folkliksarkivet i Lund, Nr 3 (Lund, 1958), pp. 161–90; Christiansen, *Legends*; Niels Lukman, “Finn og St. Laurentius i Lund og i Canterbury,” ANF 75 (1960), 194–237; Martin Puhvel, “The Legend of the Church-Building Troll in Northern Europe,” *Folklore* 72 (1961), 567–83; Lütz Röhrich, “German Devil Tales and Devil Legends,” *JFI* 7 (1970), 28–29; see also Hennig K. Sehmsdorf, “Two Legends about St. Olaf, the Masterbuilder. A Clue to the Dramatic Structure of Henrik Ibsen’s *Bygmester Solness*” *Edda* 67 (1967), 263–71. Another tale, unmentioned in the surveys, that seems to show influence of the Masterbuilder type is perhaps to be added: “Gobborn Seer” in *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales*, ed. Katherine M. Briggs, Part A (London, 1970), pp. 277–79 and references there.

4. See Boberg, “Baumeistersagen,” pp. 3–4 and notes for full references.

after twelve years the farmer would surrender to him that which was now hidden in his house." The farmer agreed, but his mother divined that the farmer's wife must be with child and that it was the child the devil was after. The devil and his helpers began building the barn the next night. The mother stayed awake; and when the barn was almost finished, she scared up the chickens so that the cock crowed before the usual time. With the cock-crow, the construction ceased, and daylight showed that one wall was still lacking; the blame was laid on a helper who had been too slow with a load of stones, and the devil took revenge on him. The barn with its peculiarities can still be seen.⁵ This example is typical of Germany except for the closing, where the cause impeding the building is diverted inconsistently from the direct effect of the cock-crow onto a delayed helper. Most folklorists assume that in these stories the devil has replaced an earlier supernatural creature (such as a giant) and thus that this type of story is very old.

Denmark forms a transitional zone between the Continental versions and the very strongly attested and well-articulated Scandinavian versions where the masterbuilder is a troll or giant, the task normally the construction of a church (also frequent in the south), the most famous being localized at Trondheim, where St. Olaf is the contractor and the troll Skalle the masterbuilder, and at Lund, where Finn is the builder and St. Lawrence the contractor. The most important Scandinavian feature, however, is the addition of a clause to the contract: the troll shall earn the sun and the moon or St. Olaf's life (St. Lawrence's eyes, etc.) unless he fails to finish within the period set *or*—the new feature—unless the contractor can guess his name before the end of the set period. Folklorists have not arrived at a consensus on the origin of this feature (e.g., von Sydow derived it from Type 500 Tom-Tit-Tot, Boberg suggests wider possible sources)⁶ or on the origin and spread of the Finn/Skalle type, though it is clear that the naming motif is an addition to the simpler Continental type.

In addition to these two major types, the Continental Devil-as-builder and the Scandinavian Finn/Skalle tale, there are important

5. Georg Schambach and Wilhelm Müller, edd., *Niedersächsische Sagen und Märchen* (Göttingen, 1855), p. 152.

6. C. W. von Sydow, "Studier i Finnsågen och besläktade byggmästarsågnar," *Fataburen* (1907), pp. 65–78, 199–218; (1908), pp. 19–27, specifically (1908), pp. 22–23.

related stories from the marginal Celtic and Baltic areas. One Celtic tale (in three variants) concerns a saint who erects a church with the help of an animal (an ox, a horse, or a reindeer); however, in one variant the building motif is overshadowed by the motif of the animal that can be eaten over and over again (e.g., Thor’s goat).⁷ The fuller of the other two variants tells how St. Mogue (Aidan) began work on his church one evening. There were helpers, and the walls rose rapidly; a gray horse was bringing the last load of stones, and the sun was within a foot of rising when the devil bewitched a red-haired woman into putting her head out her window and crying “Oh, musha, St. Mogue, ashore! Is that all you done the whole night?” The saint was so astounded that he and all the workmen stopped work, and the horse let the load fall. The cathedral was never finished, and the stones can be seen on the hillside nearby. This baffling, probably confused story, already compared by Kennedy to the Finn/Skalle tales,⁸ seems to stand closer to the Devil-as-builder type, with the motif of female interference and the false dawn (the meaning of the red hair?). The fact that the saint has switched roles with the devil obviates the contract motif, and the Scandinavian naming motif is missing (or just possibly vestigial).

A second Celtic tale, extant in a single text localized at Stirling, is exactly like the Finn/Skalle type except that the ending (the sidhe-man Thomas flies out through the wall of the castle in a flame, leaving a hole that can be stopped by nothing except horse dung) resembles the Continental tales.⁹ Finally, von Sydow and Fossenius cited as parallels several Celtic tales in which a giant enters the service of the hero Fionn and requires an extraordinary reward.¹⁰ Though there is some resemblance to the Scandinavian tales in isolated motifs, the Fionn stories as a whole are not convincing analogues.

In the Baltic area related tales have two giants as builders in compe-

7. For references and summaries see C. W. von Sydow, “Tors färd till Utgard,” *Danske studier* (1910), pp. 96–97; there are four variants here if von Sydow’s Irl. 6 is close enough to count.

8. Patrick Kennedy, ed., *Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts* (London, 1866), pp. 340–42.

9. James MacDougall, *Folk Tales and Fairy Lore*, ed. G. Calder (Edinburgh, 1910), pp. 168–73; first cited in this connection by Mai Fossenius, “Sågnerna om trollen Finn och Skalle som byggmästare,” *Folkkultur* 3 (1943), 82–86.

10. C. W. von Sydow, “Iriskt inflytande på nordisk guda- och hjältesaga,” *Vetenskaps-societeten i Lund: årsbok* (1920), pp. 26–27; Fossenius, pp. 74–78.

tion, and in a few St. Olaf does the work himself but falls like Skalle at the last minute. Some variants of this form give Olaf a satanic helper, and others have a motif of female interference.¹¹

Finally, we find the Masterbuilder legends sparsely attested in Iceland. In addition to the story of the building of the church at Reyni, obviously a late derivative from the mainland Scandinavian Finn-type which can be ignored here,¹² Iceland has offered only one example of these legends: the famous myth of the building of Asgard. In chapter 42 of *Gylfaginning* Snorri tells how a craftsman came to the gods and offered to build, in a year and a half, a great fortress in which the gods would be safe from attacks of the giants, but he required as his price that he should have Freyja as his wife and also the sun and the moon. The gods retired to take counsel and made a plan. They agreed but set terms that they thought would make it impossible for the workman to keep his end of the bargain, for the work was to be done in one winter and with no aid, but they allowed the craftsman the use of his stallion Svaðilfari. The craftsman and his horse worked chiefly at night, hauling great boulders for the walls, and three days before the end of winter the task was almost finished. The gods, however, hit upon a plan to thwart the completion of the work: Loki took on the form of a mare, luring the stallion away for one night and halting the building. The craftsman, when he saw that the work would not be finished on time, fell into a "giant-rage." The gods then called in Thor, who immediately killed the giant, breaking all oaths.¹³

Gerhard Schoening (1762) was probably the first to compare this myth to the Masterbuilder Tale which he knew in the form connected with Trondheim Cathedral (Skalle's reward to be the sun and moon or St. Olaf himself),¹⁴ and almost all commentators since have agreed that

11. For discussion and references see Boberg, "Baumeistersagen," pp. 11-12 and notes.

12. Jón Árnason, ed., *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri* (Leipzig, 1862-64), I, 58, discussed by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, "Íslandske Folkesagn," *Nordisk kultur* 9 (Copenhagen, 1931), 188-89 and *Um íslenzkar þjóðsögur* (Reykjavík, 1940), pp. 47-49.

13. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Gylfaginning og prosafortellingene av Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anne Holtsmark and Jón Helgason, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen, 1968), pp. 45-47; as far as possible quotations are from this edition (abbreviated *Edda*); otherwise from *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Arnarnagæan Commission, 3 vols. (Hafniae, 1848-87) (abbreviated AM) or *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1931) (abbreviated FJ).

14. *Beskrivelse over den vidt berømte Domkirke i Trondhjem*; cited by Fossenius, p. 73.

the similarity between this myth and the folktales is too great to be accidental. The search for a genetic explanation of the similarity offers the familiar three choices of comparative studies, but most commentators have excluded polygenesis because the similarities are both systematic and detailed and do not seem to be rooted in some common social reality such as a widespread type of ritual. Of the remaining explanations, descent from a common original form and derivation of the folktale from the myth or the myth from the folktale, the first has been the most popular though diffusion in both directions has also been proposed, as the following review of opinions will show.

The mythologically oriented folklorists of the nineteenth century were in agreement that the *Sagen* were all descended from the myth, survivals in folk memory of a Germanic myth that Christianity had been able to modify but not suppress, though they did not agree on the exact meaning of the nature symbolism they saw in the myth.¹⁵ More important is the remarkably forward-looking explanation of Sophus Bugge (1881–89), for whom the myth was to be understood within his radical thesis that a great number of Scandinavian heroic legends and myths “reflect or at least developed under the influence of tales, poems, legends, religious or superstitious concepts which the heathen or half-heathen Scandinavians in the British Isles during the Viking period heard from Christians, especially monks and persons educated in monastery schools”—that is, that much of Old Norse narrative is traceable to Judeo-Christian and Classical culture.¹⁶ Bugge rejected the prevalent notion among the older researchers that the folktale was the detritus of the myth, pointing out that the folktale is distributed far beyond the Germanic areas, that the folktale appeared in too many variant forms to be derivable from a single myth, and that there is no trace of the divine personages of the myth, especially Loki, in the folktale. Instead he proposed that a folktale closely related to the ones still current “formed the main basis for the Eddic myth, with which several other elements, quite

15. Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen, 1844), pp. 514–16; Karl Simrock, *Deutsche Mythologie*, 6th ed. (Bonn, 1887), pp. 55–57; Otto Henne-Am Rhyn, *Die deutsche Volkssage*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1879), pp. 384–92. Sveinsson, *Þjóðsögur*, pp. 47–49 apparently still holds with descent.

16. Sophus Bugge, *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, 1. række (Christiania, 1881–89), I, 8–9.

unlike in origin, have fused.”¹⁷ After indicating the points at which the myth had diverged from the folktale, Bugge introduced the Laomedon legend (the building of the walls of Troy) as the source of the deviant elements, and he proposed a specific version of the Troy legend, that of the First Vatican Mythographer, as the source; the nexus to Norse myth will have been made in Ireland where the version of the First Vatican Mythographer was known and used in a Troy-book. Bugge shows how individual features of the Troy story were taken out of context and worked into the folktale to give the version known in Old Norse myth. For example, the famous crux *Völuspá* 25: “hverr hefði lopt allt / lævi blandit,”¹⁸ is explained as reflecting Apollo’s actions after he had been cheated of his reward: “Unde indignatus Apollo pestilentiam eis inmisit.” Snorri himself, according to Bugge, did not fully understand and so paraphrased *Völuspá* as “hverr því hefði ráðit at spilla loptinu ok himninum svá at taka þaðan sól ok tungl ok gefa jötnum.” The phrase “the sun and the moon” is explained as drawn from the current folktale—a secondary influence of the tale.

It will not be necessary to mention all the features supposedly drawn from the Laomedon story to show the faults of Bugge’s admittedly brilliant theory. His assumption that a *living myth* was drawn from a folktale is unproven and as unjustified as the opposite notion found among Grimm and the older mythographers: that a genuine common Scandinavian myth should have been generated in the narrow and partly bookish way Bugge’s theory requires is very unlikely. Nor is the extraction of motifs out of context a plausible process. Why should it have become an article of North Germanic faith—presumably the significance of a “myth”—that Loki poisoned the air because in a different context and in a text with very questionable connections with the North Apollo, whose role in the story corresponds to the builder, not to Loki, “sent them a pestilence?” (The myth-forming process might better have hit upon the revenge taken by the other builder in

17. Ibid., p. 259 and generally pp. 257–65. Another early denial that the Christian legends could be descended from a Germanic myth was that of Henrik Schück, *Studier i nordisk litteratur- och religionshistoria*, I (Stockholm, 1904), 21.

18. Thus the text cited in the *Prose Edda*; an important variant, *hverir for hverr*, is found in the Codex Regius of the *Elder Edda* (cited throughout from *Edda* ..., ed. G. Neckel, I. Text, 4th ed. rev., Hans Kuhn [Heidelberg, 1962]).

the Latin mythography since "Neptune sent a great whale!") Finally, Bugge's attitude toward Snorri and the *Völuspá* is not sufficiently critical; though he recognizes some disagreements between them, he basically accepts both as presenting a living Germanic mythology.

A turning point in the study of the prose *Edda* came with the later work of Eugen Mogk (1920s and 30s);¹⁹ though he did not write specifically on the Asgard story, the scholarly movement started by him is very important, I believe, for finding a satisfactory solution to the Asgard problem. Mogk argued that most of the sources of Scandinavian mythology known to Snorri are also known to us; much has survived in the *Poetic Edda*, skaldic poetry, and verse cited by Snorri himself; and after all Snorri was writing two and a quarter centuries after the conversion in Iceland. It becomes necessary, then, to view critically Snorri's use of his sources, and the possibility arises that some of the stories not attested in verse are fabricated by the author himself. In fact, Mogk went so far as to argue that Snorri had a kind of school of mythological romancers at Reykjaholt; and while most scholars have thought Mogk's case overstated and believed with Anne Holtsmark²⁰ and Jan de Vries²¹ that Snorri did have access to more information about Old Norse paganism than we do, Mogk's *Quellenkritik* is now recognized as a vital principle for dealing with Snorri's *Edda*.

That is, it is recognized among traditional, philologically oriented scholars, not, however, by Georges Dumézil in his important study of Loki (1948). There Dumézil wittily and sometimes personally attacks Mogk and is able to damage some specific analyses of Mogk's.²² Dumézil's attempt to vindicate the Asgard story as myth is, however,

19. Eugen Mogk, *Novellistische Darstellung mythologischer Stoffe Snorris und seiner Schule*, FFC 51 (1923) and "Zur Bewertung der Snorra-Edda als religionsgeschichtliche und mythologische Quelle des nordgermanischen Heidentums," *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig*, Philol.-hist. Kl. 84 (1932), 1-18. The critical spirit is felt before Mogk in Sigurður Nordal's brief discussion of the Asgard story in *Snorri Sturluson* (Reykjavík, 1920), pp. 124-25: Nordal is cautious about taking *Gylfaginning* as a source of pagan religion but believes that the Masterbuilder story is an example of Snorri's being better placed to interpret *Völuspá* than we are; yet Nordal points out that Snorri tells the myth as the *first* building of Asgard while a consecutive interpretation of the poem requires that it be a *rebuilding* after the war with the Vanir.

20. Anne Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, Skrifter utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, II. Hist.-Filos. Kl., N.S. 4 (Oslo, 1964), p. 5.

21. De Vries, *Problem*, p. 288.

22. Georges Dumézil, *Loki* (Paris, 1948), pp. 81-109.

turned against Jan de Vries who had treated the story to an exemplary piece of *Quellenkritik* in his book *The Problem of Loki* (1933).²³ The main accomplishment of this section of de Vries' book is to have proven that the Asgard story is wrongly imposed on stanzas 25–26 of *Völuspá*, which seem to refer to quite another situation. This is the main point and the one on which Dumézil attacks him, to my mind without effect. The remainder of de Vries' discussion is less satisfactory. He sees the logic of the assumption Mogk would have made, that Snorri composed the myth himself, though he is unwilling on principle to accept this. He believes that Snorri knew the story as a "myth from oral tradition" (p. 76), and yet his reconstruction of the original form of this myth does require a number of innovations by Snorri: the connection between the building story and the birth of Sleipnir is "an arbitrary combination of Snorri or one of his predecessors" (p. 77); the role of Thor at the end of the story is an accommodation to lines from *Völuspá* 26 ("Þórr einn þar vá / þrunginn móði, / hann sialdan sitr / er hann slíkt of fregn") since in the original de Vries imagines Loki as acting singly on behalf of the gods. On the largest issue at stake, "the transition between myth and folk-tale," de Vries can offer no help (p. 76).

The most recent discussion of the Asgard myth, by Anna Birgitta Rooth (1961), is inconclusive from our point of view; this is perhaps due to the exclusive focus of her book on finding the unique and therefore original elements in the figure of Loki.²⁴ Rooth does, however, accept de Vries' demonstration of the independence of *Völuspá* 25–26 from Snorri's myth and seems to approve also of Bugge's general approach.

One of the most comprehensive early discussions of the Asgard story was that of the folklorist C. W. von Sydow (1908).²⁵ Though he recognized some innovations on Snorri's part, von Sydow does not dwell on the question of the relation of Snorri's prose to *Völuspá* but accepts the story as presented in Snorri's *Edda* as a reflection,

23. De Vries, *Problem*, pp. 65–82; Dumézil, pp. 124–29.

24. Anna Birgitta Rooth, *Loki in Scandinavian Mythology*, Skrifter utgivna av Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Lund, 61 (Lund, 1961), pp. 35–41. See the review by Anne Holtmark, "Loki—en omstridt skikkelse i nordisk mytologi," *MM* (1962), pp. 81–89.

25. *Fataburen* (1908), pp. 24–27.

if distorted, of a heathen myth or legend. He solves the problem of the myth's relation to the Finn/Skalle tale in very broad strokes by tracing them as narrative patterns to a single ancestor (hypothetical but resembling *Alvíssmál*) and then accounting for divergent developments such as the introduction of the naming motif in the folktale from the Titeltiture märchen (Type 500) and the role of Loki in the myth as an extrapolation from other stories about Loki. De Vries has criticized some details in von Sydow's interpretation (pp. 67–68), but more important is the fact that von Sydow sheds no light on the relation of Snorri to his sources or on the genuineness of the myth, and as to the relation between myth and folktale we still “grope in the dark.”

In later work (1920) von Sydow sought to derive the original of both the myth and the Scandinavian Finn/Skalle tale from an Irish source.²⁶ This explanation was adopted and more fully set forth by Mai Fossenius (1943), who argued as follows:²⁷ motifs from the Irish Saint-as-builder story combined with motifs from the stories in which a giant serves Fionn MacCumal. The payment of the sun and the moon was due to a misunderstanding of the common Irish oath meaning “I swear by the sun and the moon.” Original Norse material was blended in, formed on the pattern of other episodes in the mythology: Freyja, always desired by the giants, was to be the reward; Loki, often rescuer of the gods and sometimes found in the form of a woman, combines those two roles with his role as troublemaker; Thor, perpetual enemy of giants, puts a period to the story; and the purpose of it all is to explain how Loki gave birth to Sleipnir. Fossenius thinks the Finn/Skalle tale had a parallel development to that of the myth (taking on the naming motif, etc.). Most readers will not find this a very satisfactory explanation of the formation of a myth or of its relation to folktale analogues. The derivation of the sun and moon as reward from a misunderstood oath (which is not even shown to occur in any extant variant of any analogue) can be safely rejected;²⁸ and the parallels from the Fionn-cycle are too general to carry weight. A point by point criticism is unnecessary, but the result of a close examination of Fossenius' and von Sydow's Irish arguments will be the recognition that a Celtic origin is unproven and

26. Von Sydow, “Iriskt inflytande,” pp. 26–27.

27. Fossenius, pp. 73–86.

28. With Boberg, “Baumeistersagen,” p. 7.

in any case would not meet the fundamental objections already raised to von Sydow's earlier work as an explanation of the relationship of the myth to the tales.

Another folklorist, Friedrich von der Leyen, listed briefly the correspondences between various myths and various folktales or folktale motifs, including the Asgard story, in his monograph *Das Märchen in den Göttersagen der Edda* (1899).²⁹ Von der Leyen and the folkloristic approach in general are brilliantly criticized by Dumézil, in a chapter entitled "Les Abus de la 'science des contes'," chiefly for the atomistic attention to scattered motifs to the neglect of the whole; besides, nothing is "explained" by the accumulation of parallel motifs, except insofar as it is implied that all this material, mythic and folkloristic, somehow constitutes a single corpus. Dumézil's critique of von der Leyen is well-founded; thus it is all the more striking that he is forced to note that the parallels to the Asgard story are not "des motifs de contes pris de droite et de gauche et artificiellement associés, mais exactement *un type de conte* fidèlement suivi" (p. 117).

Kaarle Krohn touched on our subject in his lectures on Old Norse mythology (1922) and in his survey of research on fairy-tales (1931).³⁰ He is in agreement with von Sydow on the ultimate origin of this kind of story in the amazement of the folk at great works of man or nature but, in accord with his radical attempt to trace most of Scandinavian mythology directly to Christian legends, assumes a simpler form of migration from the south, with additions from other story types, to explain both the Finn/Skalle tale and the myth of Asgard. This is generally convincing for the legend, but Krohn's explanation for the myth is not adequate: "Der Asgardmythus bei Snorri braucht jedoch nicht älter als die kirchenbausage zu sein, aus der er hergeleitet werden kann. Auch ist es nicht nötig, eine andere übergangsform für die sage vom kirchenbau des riesen anzunehmen als die angeführte von der nächtlichen arbeit eines wichtes, um ein gewöhnliches bauwerk aufzuführen. Die entwicklung ist in folgender

29. Friedrich von der Leyen, *Das Märchen in den Göttersagen der Edda* (Berlin, 1899), pp. 38–39; see also his "Kleine Anmerkungen zu den Göttergeschichten der Edda," in *Edda-Skalden-Saga: Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Felix Genzmer*, ed. H. Schneider (Heidelberg, 1952), pp. 87–91.

30. Kaarle Krohn, *Übersicht über einige Resultate der Märchenforschung*, FFC 96 (1931), 114–22; slightly altered from his *Skandinavisk mytologi: Olaus-Petri-föreläsningar* (Helsingfors, 1922), pp. 195–202.

richtung vor sich gegangen: eine sage von einem bauern und einem wichte, eine legende von einem heiligen und einem riesen, ein mythus von göttern und einem riesen" (pp. 121–22). This is simple and intelligible, but it brings the North Germanic mythopoeic age down almost to the conversion period (the oldest recorded story that bears a moderately close resemblance to the Masterbuilder Tales seems to be one from the ninth century).³¹ Of course, all the supporting evidence deriving Old Norse mythology from Christian legends is equally questionable, and finally there is no attempt here to come to terms with the peculiar nature of the sources, especially with the discrepancies between Snorri and the *Völuspá*.

Krohn added a new twist to the discussion by relating the myth also to a different group of stories that feature a marvelous horse. Here a man captures a gray horse and performs amazing feats of labor—sometimes of construction—with it. At the end of the day the strange horse is freed and leaps into the sea, proving to be a kelpie (Icel. *nykur*, Sw. *bäckahäst*, *vattenhäst*, etc.). A variant of this story is attested in *Landnámabók*, and in a modern Icelandic variant the kelpie, who had been used to build a church wall, gives it a kick with his hoof in parting; the resulting hole cannot be stopped.³² Dumézil succinctly criticized this "parallel" to the Asgard story: "Même là, nous sommes loin de la seconde partie du 'mythe' scandinave: Loki se métamorphosant en jument, détournant de son service le cheval du géant et mettant bas, lui-même, quelques mois plus tard, le cheval à huit pieds, le coursier d'Odinn, Sleipnir" (pp. 118–19).

Nevertheless, the idea that stories about the Kelpie-as-workhorse were the basis of the Asgard myth was taken up and developed by Brita Egardt (1944).³³ Egardt compares the Irish story of St. Mogue, the Asgard myth, and two stories, one Irish, one Icelandic, from the international stock of Kelpie-as-workhorse tales and finds that they have three factors in common: (1) the horse has amazing strength; (2) it is used as a workhorse on a building project; and (3) in two of these

31. Boberg, "Baumeistersagen," p. 4 and note.

32. References in Sveinsson, *N F* 9, pp. 197–98, n. 41 and Egardt, cited below, pp. 162–64.

33. Brita Egardt, "De svenska vattenhästsägnerna och deras ursprung," *Folkkultur* 4 (1944), 119–66, esp. 159–64. The honor of first connecting Svaðilfari with the kelpie probably belongs to A. Kuhn and W. Schwartz, edd., *Norddeutsche Sagen, Märchen, und Gebräuche ...* (Leipzig, 1848), p. 476, note; this story is quoted by Egardt.

four stories the horse is gray, while in the Asgard story the descendent Sleipnir is gray. Egardt herself observes that it is a property of supernatural horses to be gray. Moreover, horses *are* used for riding and hauling; and unless we wish to call all supernatural horses kelpies, it seems necessary to reject this overgeneral approach.³⁴ It goes without saying that Svaðilfari is not an ordinary horse, any more than the builder is an ordinary man, and Egardt's conclusion seems to be based on very thin evidence: "... Asgårdssågnen består av en kontamination av åtminstone två olika sägner, varav den ena utgöres av den om vattenhästen som arbetshäst vid bygge" (p. 164).

Waldemar Liungman (1958–59) apparently took up Egardt's suggestion when he came to give a definite answer to our question as he poses it: "Men varifrån kommer då myten om Asgård's uppbyggande?"³⁵ He rejects the connection with the Finn/Skalle-*Sage* because the myth lacks what he calls the most important points of the *Sage*: the name guessing, the cradle song, the setting up of the tower or insertion of the last stone (p. 332). But this is far too limited a conception of the most important points of the folktale and ignores the Continental and Irish analogues without the naming motif and its dependent, the cradle song. Liungman's solution is that the Kelpie-as-workhorse, in a form in which the horse is owned by a giant, is the basis of the myth. In criticism it should be observed that the connection Liungman draws is based on a single *dramatis persona*, the supernatural horse or other animal; but secure parallels of this kind should be based on the network of relations among a number of *dramatis personae*, in short upon the structure of a story, supported if possible by details of content. Liungman's conjectural stage with a giant as owner of the horse is plausible enough in a version of the Masterbuilder legend (indeed it is found in the myth), but it would be out of place in the kelpie stories where the kelpie is almost by nature a masterless creature. It is unnecessary to point out other obvious differences between the Masterbuilder

34. As Fossenius, p. 77, rejected von Sydow's comparison with "The Pursuit of Gilla Dacker and his Horse," obviously a novelistic adaptation of a Kelpie-as-riding-horse legend.

35. Waldemar Liungman, ed., *Sveriges sägner i ord och bild*, III (Copenhagen, 1959), 331 and generally 67–82, 275–338, II (1958), 39–50, 356–57; and cf. III, 83–94, 338–42.

Tales, including the Asgard myth, and the kelpie stories;³⁶ they share nothing beyond the supernatural horse with his marvelous strength.

Since Rooth's work the problem of Asgard has not been treated directly,³⁷ but it is important for our proposed solution to point out that recent scholarship on Snorri's *Edda* has been more in the spirit of Mogk than of Dumézil, and it now seems most significant to scholars to explicate the attitude of Snorri and his time toward his subject. This line of scholarship has culminated in recent years in Walter Baetke's brilliant *Die Götterlehre der Snorra-Edda*,³⁸ Anne Holtsmark's *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, and Byrge Breiteig's "Snorre Sturlason og æsene."³⁹ In these works attention has been focused on Snorri's euhemerism, or rather the mixed euhemerism and demonism that Snorri adopted from the medieval church as his way of coming to an understanding of his pagan ancestors' religion; and in spite of some dissenting voices,⁴⁰ the *Edda*'s Prologue or "Formáli," which sets out in detail a learned interpretation

36. One point of difference which may not be obvious can be mentioned: apparently the kelpie is mainly useful during the *day*; in *Landnámabók*, Auðun stoti captured an applegray kelpie in the usual way, and: "Hestrinn var góðr meðfarar um miðdegis; en er á leið, steig hann í völlinn til hófskeggja; en eftir sólarfall sleit hann allan reiðing ok hlióp til vatsins" (*Sturlubók*, ch. 83; *Fortællinger fra Landnámabók*, ed. Jón Helgason [Copenhagen, 1963], p. 67). An exception is the story in Kuhn and Schwartz, p. 476. In contrast, the Masterbuilder's work normally goes on at night.

37. The remarkable essay of Wolfgang Laur, "Die Heldensage vom Finnsburgkampf," *ZDA* 85 (1954-55), 107-37, should also be mentioned in this survey. Laur's aim is to show that the story of the fight at Finnsburg (reconstructed from the OE *Finnsburg Fragment*, the Finnsburg Episode in *Beowulf*, and allusions in *Widsith*) is derived from a myth like that of the building of Asgard. Laur relies heavily on von Sydow and throws no independent light on any matters of concern to the present article; but his view, if acceptable, would support the traditional views of the Asgard story as genuine myth. However, his procedure is so arbitrary that I cannot accept it even on its own terms; for further strictures see Klaus von See, *Germanische Heldensagen* (Frankfurt, 1971), pp. 50-51.

38. *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig*, Philol.-hist. Kl., Bd. 97, Heft 3 (Berlin, 1950).

39. *ANF* 79 (1964), 117-53; and in a similar vein, A. H. Krappe, "Die Blendwerke der Æsir," *ZDP* 62 (1937), 113-24.

40. Lars Lönnroth, "Tesen om de två kulturerna: Kritiska studier i den isländska sagaskrivningens sociala förutsättningar," *Scripta Islandica* 15 (1964), 79-83; Anker Teilgard Laugesen, "Snorres opfattelse af Aserne," *ANF* 56 (1942), 301-15, esp. 309-13; Andreas Heusler, *Die gelehrte Urgeschichte im altisländischen Schrifttum* (Berlin, 1908); see the full review in Breiteig.

of Germanic paganism and prehistory, can now be regarded as Snorri's work and integral to the *Edda* as a whole.⁴¹

II. A New Analogue

The previous scholarship, then, yields few firm conclusions for the question posed above: myth or folktale? However, a new Icelandic analogue may offer a way around the impasse: the story of the berserk builders in *Heiðarvíga saga* (chapters 3–4) and *Eyrbyggja saga* (chapters 25 and 28) tells how Víga-Styrr acquired two berserk followers. For a time they were content taking part in his feuds; but soon one of the berserks fell in love with Ásdís, Styrr's daughter, and asked her hand in marriage. Styrr consulted Snorri goði and formed a plan to rid himself of the threat of the uncouth berserks. He agreed to give Ásdís to the berserk on the condition that the latter perform certain Herculean building tasks—clear a path across the lavafield to Vermundr's farm, erect a wall at the boundary of Styrr's land, and construct a sheepfold. While both berserks were engaged on this work, Styrr himself built a bathhouse; and when the berserks had finished their work, he enticed them inside where they were scalded and finally killed as they attempted to escape. They were buried in the lavafield near the site of their great works.⁴²

In spite of its realism the story of Víga-Styrr and the berserks is easily recognizable as legendary material. The etiological element, though not explicit in either saga, is unmistakable and probably survives from a presumptive oral stage: the modern name of the lavafield and adjoining farm is Berserkjahraun, and the path is called Berserkjagata.⁴³ But beyond these

41. The unity of the *Prose Edda* is effectively argued by Baetke, Holtsmark, Breiteig, and Elias Wessén, ed., *Codex Regius of the Younger Edda* ..., Corpus codicum Islandicorum medii aevi, 14 (Copenhagen, 1940), pp. 11–28.

42. *Heiðarvíga saga* (abbreviated *Hv*) is cited from *Borgfirðinga sögur*, Íslenzk fornrit 3 (Reykjavík, 1938), ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson; *Eyrbyggja saga* (abbreviated *Eb*) from Íslenzk fornrit 4 (Reykjavík, 1935), ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson.

43. So Kr. Kålund, *Bidrag til en historisk-topografisk beskrivelse af Island*, I (Copenhagen, 1877), 432–34; but cf. n. 67a below.

general features of oral legend, the tale of the berserks exhibits too many systematic structural similarities to the folktales of the Masterbuilder type to be entirely independent of them. It is, however, very plain that the story in the sagas agrees still more closely with Snorri's myth, where the actors, the relationships among them, and the overt actions form close parallels: Styrr/the gods promise Freyja/Ásdís to an uncouth suitor, the giant/the leading berserk, as payment for a miraculous building feat; the giant/berserk asks for and is allowed the aid of a single helper, his horse/his brother (*Hv* only). The work goes on especially at night (*Hv* only?), involves the hauling of great boulders, and is a wonder to ordinary gods/men. When the work is nearly finished, the contractor, the gods/Styrr, sends a female, Loki as mare/Ásdís, out to approach the workers (only in *Hv* is Ásdís explicitly *sent*). In some way she disturbs the work in progress; and directly afterwards the giant/berserks are slain by Thor/Styrr. Naturally the stories do not coincide in every detail; but the structural similarity and correspondence in details is more than enough to assign the story of the berserk builders to the general type of Masterbuilder Tale. A detailed study of the saga tale in relation to the myth and folktales is in order.

(1) Comparison between the conference of Styrr and Snorri goði and the first or second council of the gods suggests itself as a further similarity of detail, and many of the folktales have a similar feature that might be called “outside advice”; but neither of these councils of the gods coincides exactly in position to the conference in the saga. This discrepancy points to the chief difference in structure between the story in the sagas and the folktale: in the folktale forms the *initial moment* is usually the human contractor's need to raise a building, while in *Eyrbyggja saga* the initial moment is clearly the desire of the leading berserk for Ásdís, and the building tasks follow as a condition of the bargain. This sequence of events suggested to Dehmer that the story in *Eyrbyggja* was fundamentally a wooing tale related to fairy tales in which tasks are imposed on a wooer-hero; he pointed to fairy tales in which “dem unliebsamen armen Freier drei Taten auferlegt werden, wobei man natürlich im stillen hofft, ihn loszuwerden, da man nicht glaubt, dass der Freier die Werke werde vollbringen können. Hausbau und

Ähnliches kommt dabei oft genug als Aufgabe vor. Alles wird mit Unterstützung eines dämonischen Helfers oder dankbarer Tiere zum glücklichen Ende geführt, woran hier die Hilfe des Bruders erinnern könnte.”⁴⁴ Dehmer cites in support first Type 461 (“Three Hairs from the Devil’s Beard”; Grimm No. 29)⁴⁵ and then, somewhat more plausibly, Type 513A or B (“Six Go through the Whole World”; Grimm Nos. 134 and 224; “The Land and Water Ship”; Grimm No. 71). In stories of Type 513 the hero has to accomplish tasks or pass tests before receiving in marriage a princess who had been offered to any man who could accomplish the tasks. It seems that Dehmer’s discussion is the basis of the saga editors’ only comment on the matter; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson observes in a note: “Það er títt í ýkjusögum, að menn verða að vinna þrautir nokkurar til að ná dýrum ráðahag. Þess háttar frásagnir hefur söguritarinn í huga.”⁴⁶ Later Reidar Christiansen also briefly related the incident in *Eyrbyggja saga* to the imposition of tasks on a wooer-hero in the context of a discussion of Type 313 (Tasks and Magic Flight) and related märchen,⁴⁷ and Inger Boberg’s motif-index lists the story of Víga-Styrr and the berserks in *Eyrbyggja* as H359.2 Suitor test: clearing land.⁴⁸

Clearly there is a good deal of similarity between Styrr’s action in assigning the building tasks and the situation in some of these fairy tales. However, the motifs in question (H335, H336, H338, H359) are in the fairy tales usually bound up with T68 (Princess offered as prize) and F601.2 (Extraordinary companions help hero in suitor tests),

44. Heinz Dehmer, *Primitives Erzählungsgut in den Íslendinga-Sögur* (Leipzig, 1927), pp. 86–91, ref. to p. 90.

45. The comparison is very far-fetched as the following outline based on that of A. Aarne and S. Thompson, *Types of the Folktale*, FFC 184 (1964) will show: (I) The prophecy that a certain poor youth (“fortune’s favored”) will wed the princess comes true despite the king’s efforts to kill the boy; then (II) the king assigns him a quest for the devil’s three golden hairs; on his way (III) he is posed three questions which he promises to answer on his return from Hell; in Hell (IV) he obtains the hairs and the answers with the help of the Devil’s wife or grandmother, and returns giving the answers to each question as he goes (V). The cruel king is punished when he attempts to repeat the boy’s journey (VI).

46. *Eb.* p. 72, n. 3; cf. Sveinsson, *Þjóðsögur*, p. 221, n. 1 and pp. 218–21.

47. Reidar Th. Christiansen, *Studies in Irish and Scandinavian Folktales* (Copenhagen, 1959), p. 97 and pp. 81–108.

48. Inger M. Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnaeana, 27 (Copenhagen, 1966).

H335.0.1 (Bride helps suitor perform his tasks), or G530.2 (Help from ogre’s daughter or son); and in general the task motif is mounted in the sagas in a context quite unlike that of the relevant tale-types (313, 502, 513, 518, 570, 577).⁴⁹ Ásdís’s part is certainly not to help the berserks, rather it appears that she originally hindered them; and she is not offered as a prize, as is usual in the fairy tales. Halli and Leiknir are by no means fairy-tale heroes; they have, as berserks, much in common with ogres and giants but little beyond their relative poverty in common with the “fortune’s favored” märchen hero, and of course the outcome of the story is the reverse of that of the fairy tales. On the other hand, in both saga texts Styrr’s ostensible objection to the marriage is the difference in wealth between Ásdís and the berserk, and Styrr’s striking reference in the *Eyrbyggja* text to the customs of the ancients may well allude to the fairy-tale situation: “Nú mun ek gera sem fornir menn, at ek mun láta þik vinna til ráðahags þessa þrautir nökkurar” (p. 72). At most, however, these words can refer to the immediate incident, the imposition of tasks on an unwanted wooer, and not to a type of märchen. In the context of the story as a whole such an allusion would be highly ironical, exchanging the roles of protagonist and antagonist; and despite Styrr’s allusion the story of the berserks seems to be more closely linked with the *Sagen* and with the myth of Asgard than with märchen of the “giant’s daughter” family.

However, it is not entirely clear from the Icelandic texts that wooing was the original initial moment; *Hv* is actually ambiguous on the question: the action is set in motion by the wooing, but Styrr explains that he has long been planning the building project: “Hér er hraun hjá bæ mínum, illt yfirreiðar; hefi ek opt hugsat, at ek vilda láta gera veg þar um ok ryðja þat, en mik hefir skort mannstyrk; nú vilda ek, þú gerðir þat” (p. 222). And in the *Edda* there is a similar ambiguity: “Þat var sima í ǫndverða byggð goðanna, þá er goðin höfðu sett Miðgarð ok gert Valhøll, þá kom þar smiðr nökkvorr ok bauð at gera þeim borg á þrim misserum ... En hann mælti sér þat til kaups at hann skyldi eignaz Freyiu, ok hafa vildi hann sól ok mána” (p.

49. Another group of motifs which offer similarities with the stories told by Snorri and the sagas is found only in the Baltic area: H335.0.3 Devil as suitor assigned tasks; H1131.2 Devil as suitor assigned to build bridge or dam. Cf. also Baltic references given by Liungman, *Sägner*, III, 332–33; I have not been able to consult these Baltic tales.

45). Presumably the giant builder came to the gods because he desired Freyja; yet the whole situation of the gods implies their need to build a stronghold. Von Sydow (who, of course, was not concerned with the story of the berserks) wished to reconstruct the original form of the myth/folktale by comparison with *Alvíssmál*, where a dwarf suing for the daughter of Thor in marriage is kept talking until the morning sunrise petrifies him. (Some of the Masterbuilder folktales end with somewhat similar petrifications.)⁵⁰ The original form would, then, have the builder's wooing as first element, but it is doubtful that von Sydow's rather farfetched comparison can be used in this way. We cannot say with certainty from the sagas and *Edda* whether an Icelandic "oikotype" began with wooing; if it did, then the early Icelandic forms (with some weakening in *Hv* and *Edda*) agree against the usual form elsewhere. It is also possible that the ambiguity of *Hv* and *Edda* is closer to an Icelandic "oikotype" and that the *Eb* author has sharpened the focus on the wooing—something the self-conscious literary reference in "Nú mun ek gera sem fornir menn" might lead us to expect.⁵¹

(2) The saga incident has *two builders* or a builder and a helper; this agrees especially with the myth, but also with scattered variants of the folktale. Tales with two giants or trolls seem clustered on the eastern side of the Scandinavian area and in the Baltic.⁵² In the west one builder aided by an animal is found, sparsely attested, in the Irish area and once in Norway.⁵³ Thus the Icelandic forms contrast, but not dramatically, with the general form of the folktale where the builder is alone, though many of the Continental versions give the Devil helpers too.

50. *Fataburen* (1908), pp. 25–26.

51. In some of the Continental Masterbuilder legends the payment is to be the son or daughter of the mortal (some references at Boberg, "Baumeistersagen," p. 18 and note); in at least one Baltic tale two builders compete for a single sweetheart; and finally, the mortal's daughter in marriage is to be the prize of the otherworld creature in some related tales discussed by Boberg ("Baumeistersagen," pp. 11, 14–18, 20 and notes). All this suggests that the story is naturally unstable at the point under discussion and similar variants could arise independently.

52. For references, Boberg, "Baumeistersagen," pp. 10–12 and n. 49 above.

53. The Norwegian Skalle-variant with a horse (Andreas Faye, ed., *Norske Folkesagn* [Christiania, 1844], pp. 14–15) is probably of little significance for the history of this family of legends since it seems to be a local innovation stimulated by a peculiar rock formation; de Vries, *Problem*, p. 76 extends this objection to the Irish story of St. Mogue.

(3) In the myth and normally in the folktales the work goes on *at night*:

Hann [the giant] tók til hinn fyrsta vetrardag at gera borgina, en of nætr dró hann til griót á hestinum. [...] Ok it sama kveld er smíðrinn ók út eptir griótinu með hestinn Svaðilfœra ... En þessi hross hlaupa alla nótt ok dvelzt smíðin þá nótt. Ok eptir um daginn varð ekki svá smíðat sem fyrr hafði orðit (*Edda*, p. 46).

Heiðarvíga saga is in explicit agreement:

Taka nú berserkirnir at ryðja hraunit at kveldi dags, ok at þeir sýslan eru þeir um nóttina ... Um morgininn hǫfðu þeir því lokit ... Skulu þeir nú gera eitt gerði ok hafa því lokit at dagmálum (*Hv*, p. 222).

However, *Eyrbyggja* makes no reference to the time of day until the berserks have finished their work: “Berserkirnir gengu heim um kveldit ok váru móðir mjök ...” (p. 74). The implication here would seem to be that the work was done during the day; which saga is to be preferred at this point is a problem that depends on our interpretation of further temporal indications in *Eb* (below, n. 54) and our general view of the relations of the two sagas (discussed below). I tentatively posit night-time work in the original of *Hv* and in the local legend on which it is based; here, then, the Icelandic versions do not contrast with the general folktale form, but the unrealistic night-time labor reinforces the folktale affinities of the saga analogues.

(4) In both the myth and the saga the builders move *great boulders*: “En þat þótti ásunum mikit undr hversu *stór björg* sá hestr dró ...” (*Edda*, p. 46); “... vega þeir *stór björg* upp, þar þess þurfti, ok fœra út fyrir brautina, en sums staðar koma þeir *stórum steinum* í gryfjurnar, en gera slétt yfir, sem enn má sjá ...” (*Hv*, p. 222). The stones are missing in the condensed account of *Eyrbyggja*: “Eptir þetta tóku þeir at ryðja götuna, ok er þat it mesta mannvirki. Þeir lögðu ok garðinn, sem enn sér merki” (*Eb*, p. 72). This detail of the Icelandic versions is found in scattered folktales and, of course, does not belong to the significant structural features of the tale.

(5) Both the myth and the sagas make explicit the *wonder* of ordinary persons at the mighty construction: “En þat þótti ásunum

mikit undr ..." (*Edda*, p. 46); "... var þá á þeim inn mesti berserks-gangr ... er þat eitt it mesta stórvirki, er menn vita, ok mun sá veigr æ haldask með þeim um merkjum, sem á eru, meðan landit stendr" (*Hv*, p. 222). Again less explicit is the spare *Eyrbyggja* version: "... ok er þat it mesta mannvirki ... sem enn sér merki" (p. 72). This detail, too, is implicit in the folktale and surfaces in many individual variants.

These details (1–5) have the general effect of supporting the identity of the berserk story as a Masterbuilder Tale and of emphasizing the closeness of the two early Icelandic versions, the myth and the saga tale, against the international folktale background. Four further details in the form of minor incongruities in the saga narrative confirm these results since they can best be explained by positing an original form (a local legend) of the saga tale still closer to the folktale and especially to the myth.

(1) Snorri's myth speaks of a bargain with two conditions: the giant builder must accomplish his task under a *limitation on aid*, only his horse Svaðilfari helping, and within a set period of time. The saga tale offers parallels to both these conditions, though the limitation on aid is explicit only in *Heiðarvíga saga*: "Leiknir segir, þat þykki sér eigi mikit fyrir, ef hann njóti liðs Halla, bróður síns. Stýrr sagði, hann mætti þat við hann eiga" (p. 222). Compare Snorri: "... ok var þat kaup gert við smiðinn at hann skyldi eignaz þat er hann mælti til ... skildi hann af öngum manni lið þiggja til verksins. Ok er þeir sögðu honum þessa kosti, þá beiddiz hann at þeir skyldu lofa <at hann> hefði lið af hesti sínum er Svaðilfæri hét. En því réð Loki er þat var til lagt við hann" (p. 45).

(2) The second condition, the *deadline*, is one of the most characteristic elements of the Masterbuilder Tale in the folktale and mythic forms; it is the essence of the story that the work be interrupted at the "last minute" before the building will have been finished and the contract fulfilled. The notion of a time clause seems to survive vestigially in the saga version also. In *Hv* the work is apparently carried out in a single night—the text is not very explicit here—but the sentence "Skulu þeir nú gera eitt gerði ok hafa því lokit at dagmálum" is best interpreted as a vague survival of the deadline motif: they were to have the sheep pen finished by midmorning (cf. *Hv*, p. 222, n. 2). *Eb* also seems to allude to a deadline: "Ok er lokit var mjök hvárutveggja verkinu [both the works of the berserks and the bath being built by

Styrr], var þat *inn síðasta dag* er þeir váru at byrginu ...” (p. 73). In the immediate context the phrase “the last day” lacks meaning and gives the impression of being a vestigial survival of a deadline; however, the analysis of *inn síðasta dag* here is a little more complex.

The author of *Eyrbyggja* (in contrast to *Hv*) has his leading berserk give Styrr a deadline for returning an answer to his proposal of marriage:

Halli mælti: “Þetta mál skaltu tala við þá menn, er þér líkar, *innan þriggja náttu*; vil ek eigi þessi svör láta draga fyrir mér lengr, því at ek vil eigi vera vánbiðill þessa ráðs” (p. 71).

The three days are then accounted for: “Um morguninn eptir reið Styrr inn til Helgafells ... gengu þeir á fjallit upp ok sátu þar á tali allt til kvelds ... Síðan reið Styrr heim” (pp. 71–72); “Um morguninn eptir gengu þeir Halli á tal ... Eptir þetta tóku þeir at ryðja gøtuna ...” (p. 72); “Ok er lokit var mjök hvárutveggja verkinu, var þat inn síðasta dag ...” (p. 73). The use of this deadline is, however, not very logical; Halli wanted an *answer* within three days; assuming the phrase *inn síðasta dag* does refer to Halli’s stipulated sequence of three days, it is illogically applied to the *completion of the work* after an answer has already been given. A possible explanation for this incongruity is that a local legend, the source of *Heiðarvíga saga* and indirectly of *Eyrbyggja*, had a survival of the work deadline; this was vaguely alluded to in *Hv* but clarified and altered to a deadline for the answer in *Eb*—a displacement consonant with *Eb*’s emphasis on the wooing but logically inconsistent. The original deadline in the oral legend of the berserks may have been one night (*Hv* and many folktales) or three days or nights in view of the three nights of *Eb* and the three separate tasks; Snorri’s giant’s initial offer mentions building the fortress “á þrim misserum” (p. 45), and the myth actually focuses on the last three days of the contract period.⁵⁴

(3) The deadline survives formally in the myth, but its function is much weakened as compared with the folktales. In the developed

54. These temporal indications in *Eb* may also point to original *night work*, the labor beginning about midday on the second day of the period given Styrr (p. 72), continuing by implication through the night between the second and third days and ending at evening of the third day (p. 73).

Devil-as-builder type, the demonic builder is prevented at the eleventh hour from finishing through a trick or delay of some kind; here the deadline is still fully functional in the story. In the Finn/Skalle type the naming motif has replaced the simpler Continental ending, and the function of the deadline has changed. In Snorri's myth the giant is not killed by being delayed until the rising sun should petrify him (as in *Alvíssmál*) or put him to flight (as sometimes told of the Devil-as-builder) or by having his name spoken out, rather the myth employs the normal method of killing giants in the mythology: he is struck down directly by Thor. The deadline is not altogether without a function here since it is the giant's realization that he cannot meet the deadline that leads to his *jötunmóðr*, which in turn exposes him as a giant and leads to Thor's return and his death; however, the connection between the deadline and the resolution of the story in the killing does seem tenuous by comparison to the Continental folktales.

The story of the berserks shares this loss of connection between the bargain with its deadline and the resolution of the story where Styrr takes direct action comparable to Thor's, and in this respect the early Icelandic versions agree against all others. However, as in the myth, the loss of direct function for the deadline may have been off-set in the original of the saga story by an indirect function: the deadline may originally have caused the berserks to labor in a berserk-fury rendering them weak enough for Styrr to kill; if such was the original form, it is easy to see how the addition of the motifs of the bathhouse⁵⁵ and fresh hide⁵⁶ eliminated even that function for the deadline, which then survived only vestigially. Such detailed reconstruction is of course very speculative, but there is a striking similarity between the essence and function in the stories of Snorri's *jötunmóðr* and the *berserksgangr* of the sagas, together with the panic effected by the bathhouse scalding. And this is coupled with a kind of "over-determined" ending offering

55. Dehmer connected the death of the berserks in or near the bathhouse with a fairy-tale motif which he instances from Grimm Nos. 11 and 13 (in an Estonian variant); cf. (Thompson) motif S113.2.2 and Boberg, *Motif-Index*, S113.2.2. Dehmer also compares the bathhouse death to the motif of the Iron House as it occurs in Grimm No. 71; the Iron House is a well-known murderous device, and it is not impossible that the killing of the berserks distantly reflects it. However, the presence of the Iron House motif in Grimm No. 71, which Dehmer claims with little reason as an analogue of the whole story of the berserks, is an accident without significance.

56. References at *Eb*, p. 74, n. 2 and p. xxvi.

what appear to be three different motifs that explain Styrr’s victory: fatigue after the *berserksgangr*, panic in the scalding bathhouse, and slipping on the fresh hide. The evolutionary hypothesis accounts for all these features: the original folktale-like deadline was weakened when a violent ending was substituted (evidence of this stage is preserved in the *Edda*); then the motifs of the bathhouse and, finally, the fresh hide were added totally depriving the deadline of any function but leaving a hollow vestige; *Hv* dealt with this situation by alluding vaguely to a deadline, while the author of *Eb* tried to improve the story by shifting place and function of the deadline.

(4) Finally, there is the narrative cul-de-sac that occurs when Ásdís appears before the laboring berserks. In *Eb* Ásdís simply walks out near the berserks dressed in her best clothing and answers nothing when Halli calls to her; then each of the berserks composes a stanza stating the bare situation described in the prose. In *Hv* Styrr is responsible for having his daughter dress in her best clothes and sending her out near the berserks as they work; he forbade her to warn them of his plan,⁵⁷ and she does not answer when her wooer calls; a single poem follows. It is possible that this appearance of Ásdís is inserted merely to justify the verses; but as all agree that the verses are not genuine, we might have expected Ásdís’s sally to have led to some narrative consequences.⁵⁸ In the present form of the story this is a blind motif, but it is explainable as a vestige of a motif of *female interference* as found in Loki’s role as mare and in some of the folktales.⁵⁹ Again *Hv* bears the greater resemblance to the story of Asgard in which the gods (like Styrr) send out their female saboteur, Loki dressed in his most attractive mare form.

These four incongruous features of the saga narrative, the limitation on aid, the deadline, the peculiar lack of function of the deadline, and the blind motif of female interference, are explainable as displacements from an oral legendary tale localized at Berserkjahraun and originally considerably closer in details to the myth and folktale forms.

57. Nordal comments on this warning as unlikely in a genuine saga text and probably an addition by Jón Ólafsson (*Hv*, p. cxiv, n. 2), whose work is discussed below.

58. The verses (including Styrr’s) are generally agreed to be later than the tenth century and therefore not genuine (*Eb*, pp. ix–x; *Hv*, p. cxl); Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, “Eyrbyggja sagas kilder,” *Scripta Islandica* 19 (1968), 3–38, here 4–6.

59. For references, Boberg, “Baumeistersagen,” pp. 4–6, 10–12, 18 and notes.

III. Eyrbyggja and Heiðarviga saga

So far I have ignored the complex textual relations of *Hv* and *Eb*. The story of the sole manuscript of *Hv* is well known: Árni Magnússon set the Icelandic amanuensis-antiquarian Jón Ólafsson frá Grunnavík to copy the parchment about New Year of 1727–28; the great fire of Copenhagen destroyed both parchment and copies in October 1728; over a year later Jón wrote down everything he could remember; that retelling is the only surviving text of the first part of the saga, and the *Hv* version of the story of Víga-Styrr and the berserks exists only in the part retold by Jón.⁶⁰ Jón made it clear in a note that he had consulted *Eb* for the version he gives of the berserk's poem (*Hv*, p. 223, n. 1), and of course he must have been generally familiar with *Eb*. Furthermore, *Eb* itself cites *Hv* as one of its sources (*Eb*, p. 180). Whether we interpret *Eb*'s dependence on *Hv* as written or oral, there is a sense in which *neither* of our surviving texts of the berserk story can be said to be a totally independent witness; and doubt of the value of *Hv* and *Eb* can be raised also in terms of the reliability of Jón's memory, as well as in terms of the possible dependence of *Eb* on the original *Hv* and of the surviving *Hv* retelling on *Eb*—an unpromising situation which would make a confident reconstruction of the exact words of the original *Hv* impossible.

However, the different texts are not valueless as versions of a story whose main lines and tendencies we are after. For one thing, Jón Ólafsson's memory of the main actions of the saga was obviously excellent;⁶¹ the fact that he several times appended a note showing that he was in doubt about the name of a minor character and that a few errors of his with regard to placenames have been exposed simply makes more convincing his overall faithfulness to the original. Moreover, the story of the berserks in particular is a coherent, easily remembered segment, a unified story on its own; and the fact that many details of the story survive only in Jón's retelling argues for according it a certain limited independent value; in other words, since we know he reconsulted *Eb*, if

60. The best accounts of the textual relations of *Hv* and *Eb* are in the introductions to the editions cited.

61. For a full assessment of the value of Jón's retelling see Nordal's introduction to *Hv*, pp. cvi–cxv, esp. pp. cvii–cviii; also Jón Helgason, *Jón Ólafsson frá Grunnavík* (Copenhagen, 1925), pp. 42–44.

his retelling nevertheless diverged from *Eb*, he must have remembered the story as somewhat different in *Hv*.

Similar reasons salvage, at least partly, the value of *Eb*.⁶² In *Eb* the story is one strand in the tapestry-like narrative of the saga, and it can be accounted a digression insofar as *Eb* is a saga about Snorri goði. The author retained this digression, however, even though it was his habit generally not to retell material that had already achieved written form.⁶³ The retention may be due to the striking character of the story itself, but another incentive seems to have been the author’s ability to add some facts and corrections to *Hv* and to integrate the “digression” to some extent by weighting it to emphasize the role of *Eb*’s hero Snorri goði. Unlike the author of *Hv*, the author of *Eb* lived in the area of Helgafell and was able to add certain details to the account of the burial site and correct a few details about the bathhouse killing. This, then, accounts for the peculiar nature of the *Eb* text in comparison to *Hv*: the *Eb* author condensed where he had nothing to add or modify and narrated more fully where he wanted to improve the story (e.g., the deadline and reference to *fornir menn*), to correct it (e.g., details of the burial and bathhouse), or to adjust the perspective (especially in the role of Snorri).

In *Hv* the tale has noticeable anti-Styrr coloring as compared with the *Eb* version. *Hv* seems to have a two-part structure, the first half of which is the “Víga-Styrs saga”; the earlier parts of the “Víga-Styrs saga” consist of unrequited killings by Styrr. Though continuity is mainly supplied by Styrr’s personality as *ójafnaðarmaðr*, the killings show the escalation of Styrr’s arrogance until he is killed by the son of one of his victims. Thus Styrr, though the main character of the first half of the saga is in a sense not a “hero,” and in *Hv* the legend of Berserkjahraun reflects this critical point of view and belongs to the main action of the saga (is not a digression as in *Eb*). In the episode of the killing of the berserks, Styrr acts underhandedly but manfully; and consistent with its focus on this main character, *Hv* is explicit in having Styrr responsible for Ásdís’s promenade past the laboring berserks, a motivation lost in *Eb*. In *Hv* Styrr sacrifices two oxen (called *blótmaut* in other sagas) following the killing—an unflattering

62. This argument is supported by Sveinsson, *Eb*, pp. xxxviii–xxxix.

63. *Eb*, pp. xxxviii–xxxix, with references.

allusion to an old pagan usage designed to block revenge, apparently by declaring a killing *ex post facto* a duel.⁶⁴ And finally, in Jón Ólafsson's retelling the episode ends with an anonymous community evaluation of the killing that mirrors the saga's whole attitude toward Styrr: "Spurðisk þetta víða, ok ræddu menn misjafnt of víg þessi" (p. 224).

The author of *Eyrbyggja*, now assigned to the second quarter of the thirteenth century,⁶⁵ wove the borrowed story into the complex structure of his book in a very different way and with a different point of view. In *Eb* the visit to Snorri for advice is told more fully than in Jón Ólafsson's text and with a significant reference to the fact that "þau ráð hafa sízt at engu orðit, er þar [on the Helgafell] hafa ráðin verit" (p. 72); this, together with another daylong conference with Snorri after the killing and burial (a conference not mentioned at all by *Hv*), frames the main events. The marriage of Snorri to Ásdís, which was the subject of this second talk, is mentioned only briefly in *Hv* but more fully in *Eb*. Finally, the story in *Eb* closes with a direct comparison of Snorri with Styrr: "var Snorri goði ráðagørðarmaðr meiri ok vitrari, en Styrr atgongumeiri; báðir váru þeir frændmargir ok fjölmennir innan heraðs" (p. 75). Generally, then, *Eb* increases the role of Snorri while remaining neutral or favorable toward Styrr who is presented as acting as the instrument of Snorri.

The story in *Eyrbyggja* is a little more compact than in Jón Ólafsson's retelling, and in any case it is more successful from a literary point of view despite its omissions. The author of *Eb* was writing with a self-conscious literary intention as Styrr's reference to the custom of *fornir menn* shows. This sentence would be out of place in an oral legend, and since so striking a phrase is missing in Jón's text, it may be assumed to be the addition of the author of *Eyrbyggja*, an addition that serves the double purpose of alerting the reader to the traditional nature of the story as a whole and the fairy-tale quality of the motif immediately referred to and of again underlining the role of Snorri goði whom the *Eb* author imagined as setting out his plan for

64. *Hv*, p. 224, n. 2.

65. *Eb*, pp. xlv–lii; this dating is supported by Hallvard Lie, "Tanker omkring en 'uekte' replikk in Eyrbyggjasaga," *ANF* 65 (1950), 160–77; cf. Jean-Pierre Mabire, *La composition de la Eyrbyggja saga* (Caen, 1971).

Styrr in terms of an old story. This kind of attention to antiquarian detail and the subtle and allusive mode of expression agree with all we know about the psychology of the author of *Eb*.⁶⁶

If, then, we are justified in assuming that the source of the tale told by the sagas was a migratory legend of the Masterbuilder type localized at Berserkjahraun and if the lack of exact agreement between *Hv* and *Eb* can be interpreted as I have suggested, we may try to reconstruct the development from oral legend to the saga form. A migratory legend related to the later Continental Devil-as-builder tales and to an early stage of the Scandinavia Finn/Skalle tales before the addition of the naming motif came to Iceland where its features included: two builders or a builder and a helper; a bargain with time clause, the work going on at night; the builder's reward was to be a woman related to the contractor. Possibly the feature of information or outside advice (deduced from Styrr's consultations with Snorri and the councils of the gods and found in scattered variants of the legends) was included, and certainly the story turned on female interference, perhaps in the form of some kind of flirtatious behavior by the girl, delaying the work and preventing completion until the deadline was past. This legend became localized to at least one Icelandic site, Berserkjahraun, where it attached itself to certain landmarks; possibly there was no historical basis at all, but it seems more likely that actual events (of around 984) attracted the folktale and that several kinds of assimilations among the folktale pattern, other traditional motifs, and historical facts followed. The bathhouse ruse itself may be a traditional motif, and the fresh hide certainly is. This leaves as historical core little more than the fact that Styrr killed two foreign berserks.⁶⁷ One nexus, then, between the migratory legend and the facts may have been the otherworldly characteristics

66. See esp. Lie, pp. 166–77, and Sveinsson, “Kilder,” esp. pp. 9–15.

67. Hans Kuhn, “Kappar og berserkir,” *Skirnir* 123 (1949), 108 considers Halli and Leiknir to be probably the only historical instances of berserks who came out to Iceland. The path could conceivably date from Christian times as a well-known type of “good work” (see esp. Dag Strömbäck, *The Epiphany in Runic Art: the Dynna and Sika Stones*, Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture, 1969 [London, 1970], pp. 6–8 and references), and according to Kålund, p. 433, this path is not unique (“just ikke så meget forskellig fra en af de almindelige hraunstier”); however, there is no concrete reason to doubt the sagas on the age of the works, and the *dys* does not sort particularly well with an origin in the Christian period.

of berserks who, in legend and literature, stand outside the human pale and, like giants, go about demanding women; Snorri's "Formáli," for example, couples berserks together with giants as victims of Trór or Thor (AM, p. 22; FJ, p. 4). *Eb* adds that they were Swedes, often thought of as an uncanny race—Glámr was a Swede—and both texts comment on the strange phenomenon of the *berserksgangr*.

This notion of an actual incident assimilated to a traditional pattern perhaps gains some support from the character of the site and the duality of the etiological explanation it requires. Berserkjagata is still easily passable on foot or on horse, and the stone fence that originally separated Styrr's land from Vermundr's is still plainly visible. However, the sheep pen seems to have been destroyed by modern roadwork.^{67a} Close beside the path in a low spot between two deep pits in the lava stands *Berserkjadys*, which is a rectangular, tomb-like heap of stones. All four features were man-made, but they would seem to call for two different types of explanation, one concerning construction (the path, wall, and pen), the other death and burial (the *dys*, itself a formidable construction). The historical events may have culminated in the *dys*,^{67b} while the contiguous path, the wall, and the pen attracted an international folktale of wondrous building. The resulting assimilation may explain the fact that it is in the final section of the story, the killing, that the legend of Berserkjahraun most conspicuously differs from other exemplars of the Masterbuilder type, with the exception of the myth. Some Finn/Skalle tales, supporting a similar dual etiology (the church is the work of the troll, the nearby stone, pit, etc. all that remains of the troll himself), show how easily such an adaptation can occur in oral tradition. The whole process of assimilation outlined here conforms to what is known of the way memories of actual events (*memorates*, *Erinnerungssagen*) pass to fictional legends (*fabulates*,

67a. Thanks to the hospitality of Jón Bjarnason of Bjarnarhöfn I was able to make a tour of the whole site in July 1975. Kálund's description from 1877 is still accurate except for the missing pen, which he says was called *Krossrétt*, and the modern name of Styrr's farm: Hraun, as in the sagas, rather than Kálund's Berserkjahraun.

67b. Kálund reports that at the beginning of the nineteenth century the *dys* was opened and bones of two men found, not especially big but heavy; however, he prefaces this potential support for a historical core by "det påstås, at..." (p. 433); Ebenezer Henderson's detailed account (*Iceland; or the Journal of a Residence in that Island ... 1814 and 1815 ...*, II [Edinburgh, 1818], 59–64) does not mention a disinterment.

Sagen) in folk tradition, and the passage from fully formed local legend to the artistic and realistic saga conforms to what we expect of the relation of the literary sagas to local *Sagen*.⁶⁸ However, no final decision can be reached about many details: neither or both of the two essential motifs, building and killing, could have a historical basis; the bathhouse may have been adapted to local circumstances out of the repertoire of traditional motifs or may have been historical; the fresh hide may have been added at an oral or a written stage. The vestigial survival of the deadline would further suggest that the original local oral form had a killing in which Styrr took advantage of the exhaustion that follows the *berserksgangr* (cf. *Hervarar saga*, ch. 3); if the bathhouse motif were then redundantly imposed on this form of the story, it would deprive the deadline of function—the situation we find in the reconstructed original of the local legend.

IV. The New Analogue and the *Edda*

If there was a Masterbuilder legend of the international type localized at Berserkjahraun and variously reflected in the surviving *Eb* and *Hv* texts, what was its relation to the myth narrated in Snorri's *Edda*? The addition of the berserk story as a new analogue of the Eddic myth does not significantly change the overall picture of the worldwide,⁶⁹ but especially European, Masterbuilder Tale as given in the survey articles. However, the introduction of a new analogue, which stands much closer to the myth than to any other version of the Masterbuilder Tale and which is attested from approximately the same time and place, presents a local Icelandic question in literary history along with a new avenue to solution of the initial problem: myth or folktale?

The question as applied to Iceland presents the same possibilities as we considered above: a common source going back to very ancient pre-Christian times or recent diffusion in either direction. The difficulties with an ancient heathen source are, first, that the myth is totally

68. Cf., e.g., Helga Reuschel, "Melkorka," *ZDA* 75 (1938), 297–304, and Sveinsson, "Kilder", pp. 7–9.

69. Rooth, pp. 37–39; de Vries, *Problem*, pp. 69–70.

unsupported by independent evidence in kennings, Eddic (once we accept de Vries' analysis of *Völuspá*) and skaldic poetry and, second, that the saga tale and the myth are too close to be accounted for by divergence from some common source in the *Urzeit*. This, of course, is a matter of opinion, and a hypothesis of contamination between the myth and the legend on Icelandic soil could salvage the theory of common origin; however, if the legend of Berserkjahraun and the Asgard myth go back to a common source, with or without subsequent contamination, we are no closer to an explanation of what de Vries referred to as "the transition between myth and folktale." Similar objections may be raised against the tale of Berserkjahraun being a relatively recent derivation from the myth. The myth is unattested elsewhere as myth, but the story is widely known as a folktale; it seems simplest to derive the story of Berserkjahraun directly from European migratory legends of the same type. And, again, deriving the local legend from the myth would not solve the question of the relation of the myth to the folktales generally or be easy to explain in literary-historical terms. The remaining possibility would derive the myth from the folktale, either generally or from the specific form attested at Berserkjahraun; of course, a genuine, ancient Germanic myth could not be so derived, and I will argue that Snorri created the myth out of materials he had at hand, including the tale of Berserkjahraun.

Others have found all or parts of Snorri's "novelistic" myth of Asgard suspicious; it is too logical and coherent, and its exact coincidence with a certain type of folktale is properly viewed not as a guarantee of its genuineness but as a very questionable circumstance since no other ancient Germanic myth coincides so completely with a folktale, the "folktale element" usually being limited to scattered motifs. The roles of Loki as evil counselor and as shapeshifter who bears off-spring, of Thor as giant-slayer, and of Freyja as the coveted bride of giants are common in Norse mythology and may be interpreted as borrowed from genuine myths. The only unique detail and the only point for which there is external corroboration is the fact that Loki gave birth to Sleipnir by Svaðilfari. The general form of the Masterbuilder Tale does not lead easily to this conclusion, which has no parallel among the folktales, and the combination of the building story with the birth of Sleipnir is almost certainly due to Snorri himself. Above all the absence of other references to the Masterbuilder myth makes it suspicious.

As an antiquarian Snorri will have been interested in legends, and as a widely traveled man he may have known the Masterbuilder Tale in more than one form, perhaps in the form later found at Trondheim Cathedral. But there is definite reason to suppose that he also knew the Icelandic form localized at Berserkjahraun. Snorri Sturluson was the namesake and descendant of Snorri goði, who figures so prominently in the story of Berserkjahraun, especially in the *Eb* version, and we know from the notes at the end of *Eb* that Snorri Sturluson’s mother Guðný Þoðvarsdóttir was present at the exhumation of Snorri goði. Moreover, Guðný kept house for her son Þórðr at Staðr or at Eyrr about 1218, just before she came to stay with Snorri at Reykjaholt where she died in 1221; Staðr is on the south coast of Snæfellsnes not far from Berserkjahraun, while (Qndurð)-Eyrr is on the north coast and even closer. Snorri Sturluson’s brother Þórðr lived at Eyrr which passed from him to Snorri’s nephew Sturla Þórðarson, the historian and lawman; and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson observes, in the context of the possible authorship of *Eb*, that Þórðr had plenty of occasion to travel around the peninsula. Any anecdote involving Snorri goði is very likely to have been known to Snorri Sturluson.⁷⁰

A second reason for believing that Snorri Sturluson was influenced by the legend of Berserkjahraun is the way the closeness of the saga tale and the myth mounts even to verbal agreements: “hann mælti sér þat til kaups” (*Edda*): “Styrr kvað þá þessu kaupa mundu” (*Eb*); “Ok it sama kveld ...” (*Edda*): “Taka ... at ryðja hraunit at kveld dags” (*Hv*); “of nætr dró hann ...” (*Edda*): “at þeiri sýslan eru þeir um nóttina” (*Hv*); “Ok eptir um daginn ...” (*Edda*): “... at dagmálum” (*Hv*); “stór björg sá hestr dró” (*Edda*); “vega þeir stór björg upp ... koma þeir stórum steinum” (*Hv*); “En þá er .iii. dagar vóro til sumars, þá var komit mið at borghliði” (*Edda*): “Ok er lokit var mjök hvárutveggja verkinu, var þat inn síðasta dag, er þeir váru at byrginu” (*Eb*). Given the simplicity of the language of Old Icelandic prose, none of these verbal agreements seem particularly significant, and of course I have already argued from the congruence of ideas that the saga tale and the myth had to be closely related. One verbal

70. Major references for the many certain and possible connections between Snorri Sturluson and the region of Berserkjahraun will be found in Einar Ólafur Sveinsson’s introduction (*Eb*, pp. xliii–lvii) and *Eb*, pp. 180–86 (cf. *ættaskrá*).

agreement of this kind, however, seems to me to go beyond what we would expect of the “same” story told independently in the same traditional style but without recent direct contact:

Leiknir segir, þat þykki sér eigi mikit fyrir ef hann njóti liðs Halla, bróður síns. Stýrr sagði, hann mætti þat við hann eiga. (<i>Hv</i>)	skildi hann af öngum manni lið þiggja til verksins. Ok er þeir sögðu honum þessa kosti, þá beiddiz hann at þeir skyldu lofa <at hann> hefði lið af hesti sínum er Svaðilfæri hét. En því réð Loki er þat var til lagt við hann. (<i>Edda</i>)
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There are no canons for judging in such matters, but here the agreement of ideas, the “motif” of the two stories, seems to me significantly minute and the syntactic and lexical agreements beyond the range of accident. A plausible explanation is that Snorri remembered some actual passages of the legend.

A less plausible explanation, but one that must be mentioned, is that Jón Ólafsson was influenced in his retelling by his memory of the story in the *Snorra Edda*, for the most impressive agreements with the *Edda* are found in *Hv*, not in *Eb*. However, Jón managed to retell the incident from memory without echoing *Eb* significantly (except for the verse) though we know he had recently consulted that saga. Since he (unlike Snorri, I will argue below) had no reason to think of the tale of the berserk builders in connection with the myth, any influence from Snorri on Jón's memory would have to be explained as taking place at some deep subconscious level. This distant possibility must qualify our further conclusions, but on balance such a psychological explanation seems to me more cumbersome than the assumptions made above: that the retelling here fairly reflects the original *Hv* and that the original *Hv* was somewhat closer to the oral legend than the more sophisticated *Eb* which condensed and adjusted the narrative.

V. Snorri's Motivation

If Snorri changed a legend into a myth, what could have been his motives? In writing *Gylfaginning* he was attempting to systematize and concatenate the myths and mythic allusions he found in his

sources. Where we can compare Snorri's sources directly with his own work it is perfectly clear that most of the sources take place *in illo tempore*, in that time out of time so well known from Eliade's work, while Snorri himself is continually fashioning causal connections and anticipating “future” events; a good example of this is the paraphrase of *Skírnismál* which seems to make the whole myth an explanation of why Freyr has no sword at Ragnarök.

However, Snorri's major source, the *Völuspá*, did have a strong sense of chronological sequence, and in the part of *Gylfaginning* with which we are concerned Snorri was following this poem and trying to interpret stanzas 25–26. These stanzas seem to allude to oaths made and broken and a goddess delivered into the power of giants. De Vries argued that this sequence of motifs in the stanzas suggested to Snorri a *myth* which he knew from (prose) oral tradition and that Snorri applied the *myth* none too successfully to the task of illuminating these problematic stanzas. I propose to substitute *folktale* for *myth* in de Vries' hypothesis. De Vries' oral myth is uncertain: there *may* have been genuine pagan myths told in prose and current in what we suppose to be the thoroughly Christian Iceland of about 1220, but if so, so appealing a tale should have left other traces.^{70a} On the other hand we know that a closely analogous folktale, the legend of Berserkjahraun, even showing some verbal agreements was current there at that time and have every reason to believe that Snorri had been exposed to it. So one motive for Snorri's creation of a myth from a folktale may have been desperation in the face of those stanzas of *Völuspá*, but further investigation suggests another, more creditable motive on Snorri's part.

Snorri's “Formáli” or Prologue and *Gylfaginning* agree on what might be called the Trojan theory of Scandinavian paganism. The “Formáli” begins with biblical material but quickly moves to Troy whence Óðinn emigrated to Sweden; there he established a new kingdom on the pattern of Troy. This is called Asgard, the palace to which King Gylfi comes in *Gylfaginning*; in Asgard Gylfi is told

70a. Cf. Hans Kuhn, “Das Fortleben des germanischen Heidentums nach der Christianisierung,” in *La Conversione al Cristianesimo nell' Europa dell' Alto Medioevo* (Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull' Alto Medioevo, XIV; Spoleto, 1968), pp. 743–57, esp. pp. 752–55.

stories set in “old Asgard”, that is Troy.⁷¹ The Swedish Asgard is distinguished from “Ásgarðr inn forni,” and of “old Asgard” we are told expressly: “Ásgarðr, þat kǫllum vér Troia.”⁷² Finnur Jónsson and some others have taken the Troy-clause here for an interpolation in spite of its presence in three of the four major manuscripts,⁷³ but the description of Asgard-Troy at this point agrees with the Troy of the “Formáli”; and if we are to accept (as Finnur Jónsson also does) the “Formáli” as basically the work of Snorri, it is natural also to accept this clause.⁷⁴ Much more controversial is the so-called “Eftirmáli” where the identification between old Asgard and Troy is carried still further; for example: “Sá salr hinn ágæti, er Æsir kallaðu Brímis sal eða bjórsal; þat var höll Priamus konúgs. En þat, er þeir gera lánga frásögn of ragnarökr: þat er Trójomanna orrosta.”⁷⁵ The authenticity of the “Eftirmáli” (and the neighboring “Bragaræður”), and indeed of the “Formáli” and many suspected interpolations, is among the most difficult questions in Old Norse literary history, and I cannot pretend to offer answers or even to understand fully the implications of the

71. AM, I, 8–30; FJ, pp. 3–8; cf. Holtsmark, pp. 55–60. An older general discussion of the Trojan background, with references, is found in Viktor Rydberg's *Teutonic Mythology: Gods and Goddesses of the Northland*, tr. R. B. Anderson, Norrœna Society (New York, 1906), I, 44–98.

72. *Edda*, p. 11 (reading of MS. R[egius]); FJ, p. 16; AM, I, 54; the other readings: “þat kalla menn troia” (MS. T[rajectinus]); “þat kallaz troia” (MS. W[ormianus]). Ernst Wilken, *Untersuchungen zur Snorra Edda: als Einleitung zur “Prosaischen Edda im Auszuge”* (Paderborn, 1878), p. 157, n. 70, gives a cogent reason for preferring the reading of W here: “Vielleicht war aber mit W þat kallaz (heisst gewöhnlich sonst) Trója zu schreiben, denn der den Göttern geläufige Name ist vielmehr Ásgarðr.”

73. FJ, p. xliii and p. 16, notes. Finnur Jónsson tolerated only with difficulty the Troy theory as Snorri's work (cf. esp. p. xxv and Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, ed. Finnur Jónsson [Copenhagen, 1900], p. vii), relying where possible on the strongly abbreviated Uppsala manuscript; nevertheless, it proves impossible to remove the entire Troy apparatus unless one follows the extreme view of Heusler, and perhaps it is worthwhile recalling that even the astringent Ari Þorgilsson referred to “Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr” (*Íslendingabók [and] Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Íslensk fornrit 1, pt. 1 [Reykjavík, 1968], p. 27).

74. Cf. Wilken, p. 157: “Die Anknüpfung an Trója ... findet sich in der ganzen pros. Edda so feststehend, dass es mir unberechtigt erscheint, sie im Gylf. IX (AM I, 54) als spätere Zuthat zu verdächtigen”; cf. Holtsmark, p. 56.

75. AM, I, 226; FJ, p. 87; cf. also the closing words of *Gylfaginning* in the three MSS. RWT: “... sá er Öku-Þórr, ok honum eru kennd þau stórvirki er Ektor gerði í Trójo. En þat hyggja menn, at Tyrkir hafi sagt frá Úlixes, ok hafi þeir hann kallat Loka, þvíat Tyrkir voru hans hinir mestu úvinir” (AM, I, 206 = FJ, p. 77); both these passages are rejected by Finnur Jónsson; cf. Holtsmark, p. 60.

Troy theory.⁷⁶ But it certainly appears that in Snorri’s theory the city about which myths were told to Gylfi was Troy, and it follows that the story of the building or rebuilding of Troy would be to Snorri a myth cognate with those of Asgard.

We cannot know all the possible forms in which Snorri might have encountered a story of the construction of Troy, but a number of scholars have proposed on grounds totally independent of the present argument that *Trójumanna saga* (c. 1200) has influenced the extant texts of Snorri’s *Edda*, especially “Formáli”:⁷⁷

Er Troo var eflð annan tima

Nv er þar til at taka at þa er Lamedon konvgr var drepin ok s(ynir) hans ok dottir hans hertekin en brotin borgin ok rænt fenv var Priamvs ecki nær ok er hann fra þersi tiðindi bra honvm við miok. hann for þa til Iliam með allt sitt goz. hann let þegar til borgar efna myklv sterkari enn fyr hafði hon verit enn eigi varð hon fyr allger sva sem þeir villdv fyr en Neptvnvs ok Apollo solar gvð gerðv hana. þangat vorv veit stor votn með miklv bro<g>ðvm. þar vorv þa gervir kastalar storir ok tvrnar. eigi vorv ok borgar liðin *aptr læst avðvell dri at sækia en vegirnir liðlavsir.⁷⁸

Here we have a construction legend with a human contractor and two otherworldly builders. The situation differs from that of the Norse legend/myth in that the builders are gods, but the point of view is the same: the action is seen from the side of the more human actors, the Trojans and the Æsir.

The surviving version of the Troy tale in *Trójumanna saga* does not make clear the fact that Priamus cheats the builders of their payment,

76. Cf. Jan de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, 2nd ed. rev. (Berlin, 1962), II, 214–33 and references; also Baetke, Holtsmark, and Breiteig.

77. Breiteig, p. 122; Heusler, pp. 36, 62–63 (rejecting the “Formáli”); Fredrik Paasche, *Norges og Islands litteratur inn til utgangen av middelalderen*, 2nd ed. (Oslo, 1957), p. 410: “Snorre kan ha kjent den” [i.e. *Trójumanna saga*]; Holtsmark doubts the connection pp. 57–60; admittedly the evidence is circular, being based mostly on suspect parts. Besides by Bugge, the Troy story has been compared to that of Asgard by D. C. Fox, “Labyrinth und Totenreich”, *Paideuma* 1 (1938–40), 387–88; cf. de Vries’ justified criticism (*Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, II [Berlin, 1957], 257).

78. *Trójumanna saga*, ed. Jonna Louis-Jensen, Editiones Arnarnaganae, Ser. A, vol. 8 (Copenhagen, 1963), p. 36; the Hauksbók text is quoted here though MS. O is very close at this point.

but other versions, perhaps versions accessible to Snorri, did (see the discussion of Bugge's theory, above); and *Trójumanna saga* does mention that the cheated builders were among the gods who broke down the walls at the fall of Troy: "oc <er> hann [Aeneas] kemr ad borgarhlídino sier hann ad Neftúnus oc Apollo solar god oc Sif brvtu nídr borgarueggína."⁷⁹ Apollo and Poseidon build nearly impregnable walls ("... kastalar storir ok tvrnar. eigi vorv ok borgar liðin *aptr læst avðvell dri at sækia en vegirnir liðlavsir," *Hauksbók*; MS O adds after the preceding sentence: "oc sva var firir melt at hon skyldi aldri unnin verda af ofrefli fiolmennis") like the walls of Asgard ("þá kom þar smiðr nokkvorr ok bauð at gera þeim borg ... svá góða at trú ok ørugg væri firir bergrisum ok hrímþursum, þótt þeir komi inn um Miðgarð," *Edda*, p. 45). And perhaps one is justified in comparing the *stór biörg* brought by Svaðilfari and the *mikit undr* excited by his work with the sentence: "þangat vorv veit stor votn með miklvn bro<g>ðvm."

Snorri, then, probably knew this story from *Trójumanna saga* and may have known other versions of the Troy story, and he probably knew the legend of Berserkjahraun and perhaps other versions of the Masterbuilder Tale. Of the two the folktale must be designated his source, but the Troy myth may have provided a justification for his adaptation of a folktale. Given his general "Troy theory," we may assume that Snorri accorded the Troy story or myth an *interpretatio germana* and "recognized" in the folktale the Germanic cognate of the Troy myth. In fact, his procedure may be imagined as similar to that of the older folklorists in taking a folktale for the detritus of myth and supporting a reconstruction by a foreign parallel considered "cognate." Recent scholarship portrays Snorri as interpreting Germanic mythology through the eyes of a Christian and even, to some extent, a classicist, and the admittedly complex hypothesis offered here for the Asgard myth has the virtue of suggesting the mythographic and psychological conditions required by a real explanation of the relationship between Snorri's myth and the Masterbuilder Tales and is in harmony with the best contemporary interpretations of Snorri's attitude and understanding of his material (i.e. Baetke,

79. Ibid., p. 231 (*Hauksbók*); note also that as Thor is equated with Hector (or with Tros) and Loki with Ulysses (whose hallmark is also a *horse ruse*), Óðinn is connected with Priam (AM, I, 12–13, 20).

Holtsmark, Breiteig, and to a degree de Vries). I do not believe with Eugen Mogk that Snorri meant to establish a school of mythographic romancers at Reykjaholt, and I trust, with Holtsmark and de Vries, that Snorri did have access to more information about Old Norse paganism than we do. Nevertheless, students of the *Prose Edda* now agree, in the spirit if not the letter of Mogk, that Snorri invented, colored, and interpreted more or less continuously. My proposal should be seen in this scholarly context, but it changes the motivation from purely artistic or unspecified (in Mogk) to that of a serious medieval mythographer working, in the dominant theoretical posture of his time, with a theory that combined euhemerism with demonism, took what we would now call a comparative point of view, and did not distinguish closely between evidence and interpretation.

VI. Remaining Problems

At least four problems remain to be discussed. The first three constitute possible objections to the derivation of Snorri's myth from the legend of Berserkjahraun. Though the explanation of Snorri's myth advanced here need not be confined to derivation from the version known at Berserkjahraun (Snorri may have known several versions), this narrower form of the theory is the tidier and the more demanding, and I shall stick to it in discussion of these problems. The fourth is a possible objection to the role I propose for the Troy myth.

(1) The sun and the moon as reward. Snorri's myth agrees with several exemplars of the Finn/Skalle folktale that the builder was to be rewarded with the sun and moon; this constitutes a double threat to our explanation of the myth. First, it may be objected (with de Vries)⁸⁰ that the motif of the sun and the moon as reward belongs only in a myth, a story with gods as actors, since mortals do not dispose over the heavenly bodies. This objection overlooks the fact that the motif of sun and moon functions as an *impossible demand* in the folktales, which present this as an (impossible) alternative to the life or soul of the contractor (e.g., either the sun and moon or St. Olaf's heart's blood); the impossible demand tantamount to the life of the contractor in the Finn/Skalle tales is not very far from the devil's simple demand

80. De Vries, *Problem*, p. 68; cf. Sveinsson, *Þjóðsögur*, p. 48.

for possession of the contractor or another person in the Continental forms (cf. also motif K194). Moreover, we can easily imagine the transition from the folktale form of impossible demand to the mythic form with *both* the sun and moon *and* the goddess demanded; if Snorri found in his source something like “the sun and moon *or* the farmer’s daughter”, he had only to make the demand cumulative instead of alternative to give “the sun and moon *and* Freyja.” In this change he was very clearly motivated by the desperately difficult lines in *Völuspá* 25: “hverr hefði lopt allt / lævi blandit”; and his interpretation has not satisfied many scholars: “Þá settuz guðin á dómstóla sína ok leituðu ráða, ok spurði ... hverr því hefði ráðit at gipta Freyju í Iǫtunheima eða spilla loptinu ok himninum svá at taka þaðan sól ok tungl ok gefa iǫtnum” (*Edda*, p. 46). However, a transition in the other direction, from myth (sun and moon *and* Freyja) to folktale (sun and moon *or* farmer’s daughter) would be very difficult to explain and motivate.

Granted, then, that the motif of sun and moon is more original to folktales, a second and more difficult objection is raised to the derivation of Snorri’s myth from the legend of Berserkjahraun, which gives no hint of a sun and moon motif. Snorri may have drawn the motif from some other version of the folktale, but it is not impossible that the oral legend localized at Berserkjahraun may have contained the motif. That *Eb* and *Hv* present realistic reworkings of the more folktale-like oral original is clear, and the motif itself as impossible demand is not an unlikely element in the oral milieu of Snæfellsnes. This possibility must be left open.⁸¹

(2) The horse as helper. Similarly, the fact that the builder’s helper in Snorri’s myth is a horse, in agreement with scattered versions of the Masterbuilder folktales against the legend of Berserkjahraun, poses another difficulty for the narrow form of our derivation

81. Common innovation here seems unlikely (cf. Krohn, *Übersicht*, p. 120), but it is possible that the modern Norwegian folktales have drawn the motif from Snorri’s famous text. A. H. Krappe, “Riesen und Göttinnen,” *ZDA* 70 (1933), 206–08 asserts that the idea of giants desiring goddesses and that of giants trying to steal the sun or moon are borrowed into the North from Mediterranean culture, specifically certain late Classical texts. This totally unconvincing argument may serve to remind how common the idea of loss of sun or moon is in mythology and folklore; cf. motifs A721.1, A728, A758, and A737.1 and Röhrich, p. 29.

of the myth. However, in contrast to the problem of the sun and moon, I would argue here that the underlying form of the motif is simply that of a builder with helper(s) and that the manifestation of the helper as a horse could be an accidental similarity liable to occur independently. None of the folktales tell much about the horse, and the feature of a horse as helper in scattered localities would seem adequately explained by the circumstances of real life; other draft animals also occur in the tales. It is certain, however, that Snorri had a good reason for letting the helper be manifested as a horse since he wanted not only to explain stanzas 25–26 of *Völuspá* but at the same time to account for the origin of Sleipnir. Probably his only information about the parentage of Sleipnir came from a line in *Völuspá in skamma*: “[Loki] enn Sleipni gat við Svaðilfara”; and he may simply have drawn the logical conclusion that because Sleipnir was a horse, Svaðilfari must have been one too.⁸² In any case, Svaðilfari appears nowhere else, either as a heiti for a horse or in any other equine sense.

From *Eb* and *Hv* we can only assume that the oral legend had one more-or-less giant-like builder and a helper because unlike the possible loss of a sun and moon motif from that legend, it seems unlikely that a simple process of rationalization could derive the berserk helper from an original horse. (But see Conclusion below.) However, Snorri could easily have made the opposite change to accomplish his wish to give a local habitation to the name Svaðilfari, and such a transformation would follow a familiar pattern of shapeshifting. Or Snorri may have been influenced by a specific myth or tale such as the similar story of Gefjun, who came in guise of a “traveling woman” to King Gylfi and “as a reward for her entertainment” got all the land she could plow up in a day and a night with four oxen; she turned her four sons by a giant into oxen and plowed free the island of Zealand (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 1). In fact, with Gefjun in mind it is not impossible to read such a transformation between the lines of Snorri’s story, especially in the prohibition “skildi hann af øngum *manni* lið þiggja til verksins”

82. The context of the line in *Völuspá in skamma* seems to show that there is no necessary correspondence between the nature of a monster and its parentage: Angrboða is a giantess, but Loki sired a wolf on her; a *scars* “ogress” (though perhaps referring to the Serpent or Wolf) stems from Loki; another monster comes from the eaten human heart that impregnated Loki.

and the immediate counterrequest “at þeir skyldu lofa <at hann> hefði lið af *hesti* sínum”; it was the shapeshifter Loki who advised that the request be granted. And the text twice uses the plural where we would expect a singular referring to the builder alone: “iǫtnum þótti ekki trygt at vera með ásum griðalaust ...”; “... at taka þaðan sól ok tungl ok gefa iǫtnum” (*Edda*, pp. 45–46). Of course, other explanations of *jǫtnum* here are possible.⁸³ Loki's role here is clearly dictated by conceptions of him elsewhere in the mythology (evil counselor, shapeshifter, “transsexual,” and trickster) and by the information that he gave birth to Sleipnir—he must have been in mare form when Sleipnir was conceived. And even if there was a genuine myth about the building of Asgard, Snorri has obviously tampered with it at this point by introducing Loki as mare in the position where the myth seems to require a motif of female interference. The feature of the helper as horse, then, can be explained on the basis of other demands on Snorri's ingenuity and the narrow form of the folktale-source theory.

(3) The ending of the tale. The two early Icelandic forms of the Masterbuilder Tale agree against the normal form elsewhere in having the contractor strike down the builder(s). Both the saga (legend) form and the myth offer clear reasons for this peculiarity in assimilation of the international story to the external facts of the tomb-like *dys* (cf. n. 67b) and *Völuspá* 26 respectively, and both forms are associated with further external facts that can agree with a construction story (Berserkjagata, the wall, and the pen; the destruction of the walls in *Völuspá* 24). This is essentially an accidental coincidence, but it poses a threat to the derivation of the myth from the local legend in that both Icelandic forms have a reason for introducing a common innovation independently;⁸⁴ that is, both forms could derive independently from

83. If plurals, they may refer to the giants in general; but the Arnarnaganaean edition, citing Rask's edition, takes them for dative singulars (“quod pro dat. sing. syncopato accipendum, jǫtninum, quod dedit Raskius,” AM, I, 135, n.), and this is Wilken's interpretation also (*Die prosaische Edda im Auszuge nebst Völsunga-saga und Nornagests-pátttr*, ed. E. Wilken, II [Paderborn, 1913], s.v. *jǫtunn*).

84. An example of such an independent assimilation of the Masterbuilder Tale to external facts is the version told by J. G. Hallman, *Beskrifning öfver Köping* (Stockholm, 1728), accessible to me in Harald Falk, “Sankt Olofs minne i Sverige,” *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift* 3 (1902), 83–86: a scene of St. Olaf with his feet on a dragon-bodied, man-headed creature is explained by a version of the tale in which after casting himself down from the tower, Skalle is struck by the saint's axe, bound, and laid under his footstool; the ending

a normal form of the folktale without a killing at the end, and Snorri could know such a folktale from Iceland or from Norway. However, this would mean acceptance of many other coincidences as accidental: the coexistence of two such similar stories in almost the same time and place, probably both known to the same author; the verbal similarities; the agreement of these two versions against all (?) others in the peculiar form of the female interference (Ásdís' promenade; Loki's romp as mare); and other agreements discussed above (such as the feature of two builders) which are not exclusive to the Icelandic versions. One of these, the "great boulders," seems a fairly minor surface agreement, easily developed independently, until one considers that a really ancient Germanic myth is unlikely to have described construction of a fortress of *stone*; this detail in Snorri's account is at very least to be considered rather late. Certainty is impossible, but I prefer to regard as accidental the first group of coincidences, the very distant agreement of the sequence of motifs in *Völuspá* 24–26 (one cannot speak of a story here) with that of the local legend and its site, and to accept the second group (between the local legend and Snorri) as too close for chance, as evidence of contact.

(4) Second building or first? A consecutive interpretation of *Völuspá* would require that any construction tale applied to stanzas 25–26 be the *rebuilding* of the fortress after its destruction in the war of the Æsir and Vanir (24,5–8: "brotinn var borðveggr / borgar ása, / knátto vanir vígspá / vóllo sporna"), but Snorri presents the building tale as the first foundation of Asgard ("Þat var snima í ǫndverða bygð goðanna, þá er goðin hefðu sett Miðgarð ok gert Valhöll ..."). It is striking that the construction myth about Troy is also a second construction, and, given the coincidence on this point of *Völuspá* with the Troy story, we may object to the theory of secondary influence from the Troy story on the grounds that with this double encouragement Snorri should have made his construction myth a rebuilding.⁸⁵

is obviously an accommodation to the iconography. (Thus Hallman's version does not lend any *particular* support to the thesis that St. Olaf took over Thor's functions, as argued by Wolfgang Lange, *Studien zur christlichen Dichtung der Nordgermanen, 1000–1200*, Palaestra, 222 [Göttingen, 1958], pp. 136–37, Ludvig Daase, *Norges Helgener* [Christiania, 1879], pp. 106–07, and others.)

85. A presumably accidental verbal similarity might have reinforced Snorri's association of the Troy story with the folktale; cf. *Völuspá* 24, 5–6: "brotin var borðveggr / borgar ása" and *Trójumanna saga*, p. 36: "... brotin var borgin oll."

The objection is valid but, I think, not very significant; Snorri's focus from the beginning of chapter 42 is not on the construction itself but on its results in the form of the birth of Sleipnir and on the explanation of the dark stanzas 25–26. And the fact that it is apparently the first building of the fortress of the gods in chapter 42, *despite* the authority of *Völuspá* (and *Trójumanna saga*?) lends weight to our assumption that Snorri was adapting a folktale—which, of course, could only have an initial construction, not a rebuilding.

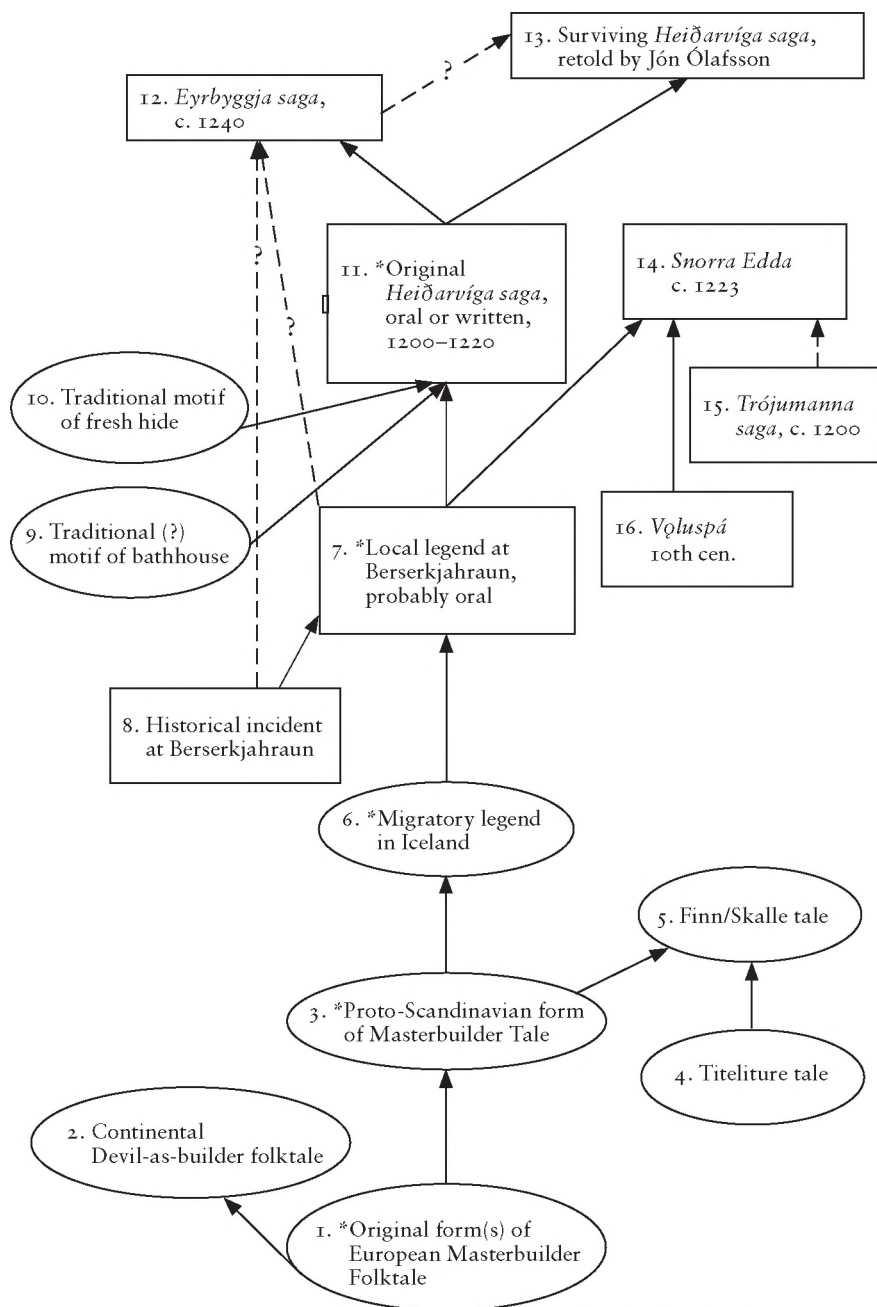
VII. Conclusions and Summary

For modern writers the Masterbuilder Tale has acquired “mythic” value in an important current literary sense of the word. Wagner transformed Snorri's version in *Das Rheingold*, into an integral part of his parable of greed and broken promises, changing the ending and many details to accommodate the moral meaning of the myth in his interpretation and the mechanics of his fusion of the divine and human histories in his sources, but it is a striking comment on the permutations of the Asgard story that the relatively realistic Wagnerian metamorphosis, lacking Svaðilfari and Loki's shape-shifting, re-approaches the saga episode in some features: there are again two superhuman builders, the brothers Fasolt and Fafner, who, like the berserks of the sagas, actually finished their mighty work, and that in a single night. Later the story—this time drawn from some Norwegian folktale—underwent a still more realistic and radical reshaping in Ibsen's *Bygmester Solness*. The Masterbuilder's fall just after Hilde has called out “Hurra for bygmester Solness!” (a dead-naming) suggests a version of the Finn/Skalle tale with female interference,⁸⁶ but Ibsen has by no means been dominated by the structure of his chosen “myth.” This kind of “myth” in literature stands in no contradictory relationship to the narrower use of the word in the body of the present study, but Wagner and Ibsen here represent more self-conscious examples of types of permutations of traditional story with retention of “mythic” force, not wholly unlike those of medieval Iceland.

The main historical conclusions of the present study can be summarized in the form of the stemma that follows below. But if

86. Cf. n. 51; essential evidence and interpretation in Sehmsdorf (cited n. 3).

correct, these results do not merely annex another bit of apparently autochthonous Nordic narrative for “Southern influence” but provide a glimpse into the workings of oral traditions underlying the realistic sagas and (following Baetke, Holtsmark, and Breiteig) some insight into the workshop of a thirteenth-century scholar. Yet general conclusions, especially of the kind Mogk rushed to, would be very premature. I am aware that an investigation of the present kind must be erected on foundations that often raise grave methodological questions; especially tenuous and perhaps personal are the discernment of “similarities” and judgments of them as genetically significant or not. However, I believe we cannot make progress in the study of Nordic narrative by resigned restatement of the obvious but must be willing to venture into the realm of arguable hypothesis. If the explanatory power of the hypothesis serves to clarify previously problematical relationships, then it has at least a temporary value. I have attempted the “narrow” or more demanding form of the argument at two points—the derivation of Snorri’s myth (14) from the local tale at Berserkjahraun (7) rather than the folktale in general (6 or 3) and from *Trójumanna saga* (15) rather than some unspecified form of the Troy story—because even if the “narrow” form with links 7–14 and 15–14 fails to convince, most of the arguments advanced can apply to the vaguer alternative.



Angular frames = localized
Rounded frames = unlocalized
Asterisk = unattested forms
Dotted lines = secondary influence

